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BY WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ



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LETTERS

The Caring Economy

Trudy Lieberman ["Wrong Prescription?" Report, July] leads readers on a winding tour of what is wrong with the Affordable Care Act before acknowledging that the legislation has achieved its main objective of significantly reducing the number of uninsured Americans. The A.C.A. prevents private insurers from denying coverage based on preexisting conditions, requires comprehensive essential health-care benefits, enforces strict medical-loss-ratio provisions (insurers must spend at least 80 percent of premium dollars on medical care), takes steps toward instituting value-based payment systems, and infuses a massive dose of federal funding to examine the comparative effectiveness of drugs, equipment, and medical procedures.

Lieberman assails the A.C.A. as "having failed a substantial part of the population it was actually designed to help" while "wreaking havoc on the middle class, much of

which had good insurance to begin with." But a recently released poll by the Commonwealth Fund found that 81 percent of Americans who have coverage through an A.C.A.-established exchange are content with their insurance. The purported negative impacts on the middle class, such as increases in premiums, patient cost-sharing, and spending on drugs, were certainly not triggered by the law. In fact, from the late 1990s to the late 2000s—long before the enactment of the A.C.A.—yearly percentage average increases in premiums, patient out-of-pocket costs, and drug expenditures were higher than today.

Joshua P. Cohen

Tufts University School of Medicine
Boston

Whether he naively thought the Republicans would compromise or was merely a closet corporatist all along, President Obama imposed a modified version of Mitt Romney's Massachusetts plan on the nation. The Congressional Progressive Caucus had had a single-payer health-care plan drafted for years, in the form of H.R. 676, but it was willing to accept a public option as a compromise position. Instead, Obama browbeat the caucus into

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voting for the A.C.A.—preferred by the much smaller contingent of Blue Dog Democrats—on the grounds that its deficiencies would be fixed later.

When right-wingers argue against the A.C.A., I have to admit that they are correct on many points: high premiums and high deductibles are real problems for many Americans, and subsidies phase out at an income level that barely qualifies as middle-class in many large cities.

It would have been much simpler to lower the age of eligibility for Medicare by five years every year, which would have brought younger, healthier people into the system, resulting in universal coverage within thirteen years. Private insurance companies could have continued to sell Medicare supplements, as they do now. When I qualified for Medicare recently, I felt that a burden had been lifted. Even with my Medicare premiums and my supplemental insurance, which pays my deductibles for almost all services, I am saving \$250 per month. Why can't everyone enjoy this benefit?

Karen Sandness
Minneapolis

The Affordable Care Act was a political compromise, not a good health-care policy, as Trudy Lieberman makes clear. "Affordable" is a misnomer, since the cost of premiums was measured only after subsidies were applied. Built into the A.C.A. are provisions to protect insurers, which guarantee that risk is managed, but these will expire in a few years. And thanks to the mismanaged rollout of the online exchanges, 2016 will be the first year that insurers will have data from which accurate rates can be developed.

The United States spends more on prescription drugs than any other nation, but catastrophic care, not drugs, accounts for a greater portion of medical expenditures. Centralizing catastrophic coverage in an expanded Medicare program, including coverage for chronic and end-of-life care, would allow us to

spread these costs throughout the national tax base.

Brooks White
Brooklyn, N.Y.

There is an antidote for what ails Trudy Lieberman. National health insurance was pioneered in the United States 120 years ago by fraternal benefit societies, whose members built hospitals, orphanages, and old folks' homes and received, for pennies per week, sickness and death benefits. These genuinely nonprofit systems, serving one third of American households, could have expanded to national scale.

In 1997, I started the Ithaca Health Alliance and free clinic, whose members were covered for most common emergencies at a cost of only \$100 per year. The Alliance was approved by New York's Insurance Department and the Chamber of Commerce, but in 2011 the IRS forced it to become a charity.

American medical insurance has become a crime, not a crisis, and what we need is a nonviolent revolution to restore nonprofit care with mutual-aid health insurance.

Paul Glover
Philadelphia

Birdbrained

John Crowley writes, "We—our kind, humankind—are unique among animals in knowing that we will die" ["Dressed to Kill," *Easy Chair*, July]. Humans have long made similar unsubstantiated assertions about animals—for example, that we were the only creatures capable of using tools and learning. But New Caledonian crows are adept at using tools, and many songbirds learn complex calls by listening to others of their species.

The brains of birds are far more complex, flexible, and inventive than previously thought—more like those of mammals than reptiles. Much is still unknown about what they see and hear. Perhaps someday we will discover more about what goes on inside their heads, and how they might perceive death.

William Young
Arlington, Va.

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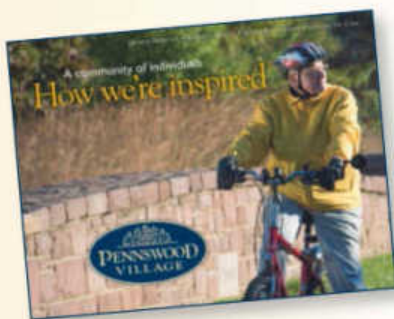
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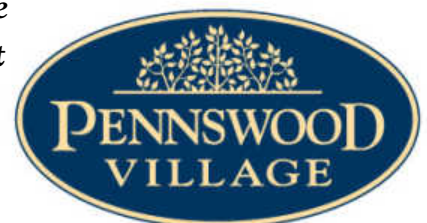
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EASY CHAIR

Selective Service

By John Crowley

It may have been that I neglected to register with the Selective Service System when I turned eighteen, in 1960, as the law required. Or maybe my student deferment, available to college students in those years, was rescinded when I dropped out for a semester in my junior year. But sometime in the spring of 1964, I received a notice to report for a preinduction physical—the first step toward being drafted into the armed forces. That I can't remember clearly the sequence of events may be a result of the terror I experienced at this and my urgent need to expunge from my life the possibility of being drafted. I could not be a soldier.

Evasion of duty was literally inexcusable in my case—that is, there were no grounds on which it could be excused. I was against war in a general way but not as a matter of conscience or deep conviction; I was as apolitical as it was possible to be for a member of the Silent Generation who was majoring in English at Indiana University, writing poetry and making underground films. The problem wasn't the threat of dying in battle or the necessity of killing; I didn't in 1964 suppose I was likely to be doing either. American involvement in Vietnam was intensifying, but it seemed that the fighting was still being done by professional warriors with special qualifications. I was deeply opposed to militarism, as it applied to me; I was an aesthete, and my objections were private feelings of dread and revulsion. In my own estimation I wasn't very manly, and the prospect of being shut up for years with many men gave me a horror I can't quite account for now.

I first acted on information from a graduate student in biology who told me that I could feign diabetes and thereby fail the urine test given during the physical. This involved consuming sickening amounts of sugar so that my urine would turn a paper test strip blue instead of red (or the reverse, I forget). Further subversions were required at the time of the physical, but, head swimming and heart pounding in sugar overload, I was not able to swamp my vigilant and powerful islets of Langerhans. I then acquired equally unreliable information that I wouldn't be drafted if I was, or appeared to be, a member of an organization on the attorney general's list of subversive groups, or if I knew anyone who was. I actually did know one or two, but at the physical in Indianapolis I couldn't bring myself to name names on the statement put before each of us, and instead simply refused to sign it. This led to lengthy and sometimes comic complications—including a personal visit from an Army investigator and a blackball from summer jobs at my university (apparently on advice from the Army)—but it did not spare me I-A draft status.

Graduate school could have kept me out of the draft for a few years (as it happened, only until 1968, when such deferments were canceled). I'm not sure why I didn't apply. Maybe I couldn't see myself as a teaching assistant any more than as a draftee. I slipped into a state of inert unbelief, and did nothing further about the draft.

That college and graduate students, like married men with children, were deferred by the rules of

the Selective Service seemed to me nothing more than odd facts of bureaucratic life. Actually it was part of a project in social engineering. In the years after World War II, it was thought that future wars would need fewer ground troops and more scientists and engineers with advanced degrees; because it was hard to be sure which studies might be valuable to the nation, students in all fields received deferments from the draft. (Married men without children received deferments thanks to a presidential order signed by John F. Kennedy; those who rushed to marry before Lyndon Johnson canceled the order became known as Kennedy husbands.)

Meanwhile, the Army lowered its physical and educational admissions standards so that more of the available men could receive the benefits of service, including training that would raise their employment prospects in the civilian world. Daniel Moynihan, who chaired a federal task force on manpower conservation, recommended the change in 1964, hoping to attract disadvantaged black youth from fatherless families. The nation would profit all around, or so went the theory.

But when the Vietnam War's personnel demands suddenly increased, college-age men from the middle and upper classes got into or stayed in universities whether they'd planned to or not, while young men with fewer outs faced a choice between enlistment and conscription. Since those who enlisted were offered more training opportunities, the prospect of conscription induced many to enlist instead. Then combat needs elbowed

aside the training programs. Under the gun of the draft, men who otherwise might have stayed single married and started families. The social landscape changed in permanent ways.

In the fall of 1964, still I-A, I moved from Indiana to New York City. The war—despite the administration's efforts at euphemism, it was now understood to be a war we were in—was expanding. The Tonkin Gulf incident had happened that August; Operation Rolling Thunder, the first major bombing campaign against North Vietnam, began the following March. Sometime between these events, my induction letter arrived.

I had two weeks until I was due to report. A second physical would accompany my induction, giving me one more chance to prove unfitness for service. In the Manhattan phone book I turned to the listings for psychiatrists and picked out one in the doctor-and-therapist souk of the Upper West Side. Finding his hourly rate—\$15—just manageable, I made an appointment.

He was elderly, with a slight Eastern European accent, gentle and soft-spoken. I explained to him that I had a pathological fear of being inducted into the Army, an aversion that went back to childhood. The family story was that when I was a toddler and my father returned from the war in Europe, I wouldn't stop crying until he took off his officer's cap. (True, and a nice Freudian touch, I thought.) The psychiatrist asked whether the Army doctors who examined me had noticed any symptoms of alarm or trauma—high blood pressure, elevated heartbeat? Well, no. So you couldn't have been too frightened, he said. I realized I'd have to up my game.

He invited me to talk about myself. I described a lonely life in the Village, where I'd expected to meet lots of sympathetic people. I talked mournfully about the close friend I'd lived with in Indiana, who had said he was coming to live with me in the city but never arrived, which was so unfair. (True again: I was paying full rent until he showed.) My father had been harsh and rational, a doctor; I'd always been afraid of him. My moth-

er, though, had encouraged me in artistic pursuits. I wanted to be in theater, or film; I wrote her often. I paused, done. John, he asked, is there something you're not telling me? Well, I said, squirming and avoiding eye contact, it's pretty hard to just say. It's that you're homosexual, isn't that right, my smiling doctor said. And I had to confess.

I considered it a good sign that he'd said it before I could. It made the rest of my performance easier. Like a Method actor, I transformed past girlfriends into boyfriends, male friends into crushes; I imagined my way into gay scenarios I had only heard about. It helped that I was presenting as cripplingly shy and relatively inexperienced, with little knowledge of the downtown cruising scene. A few weeks later I saw him again, and told more lies. He went through some Rorschach blots with me and agreed to write a letter. He gave it to me in a sealed envelope on which he'd written that it was not to be opened except by Army medical officers. I steamed it (of course) and found myself described as incipiently schizophrenic and in need of years of therapy if I was to live a useful life. Almost as a postscript he noted that I had had several homosexual experiences.

When I gave the letter to the Army psychiatrist at my induction—another gentle man with an accent, and a beard as well—he said that in his opinion I would not be happy in the Army, to which I assented. But now, he asked, what were we to say? We didn't want to say I was homosexual, did we? I didn't mind at all what we said, but mimed indecision. (That homosexual acts were crimes, that most gay men lived lives of concealment and evasion, that admissions like mine could blight careers and lives—of all this I was subliminally aware, but that I was risking harm to myself, no.) Shall we say, the doctor offered tenderly, that you're just too nervous to go in the Army? I said I thought that was just right; too nervous, yes, that's what I was.

He filled out a form, put it with the letter in another envelope that he marked was not to be opened except under subpoena, and removed me from the line. I was sent to the

commanding officer, who immediately opened the envelope and scanned the letter. He gave me a look of intense loathing such as I hope never to see again and sent me away. I sat down on the curb outside the induction center and wept in relief.

The naïveté I aspired to display to my psychiatrist was real. It took me years to realize that very likely he knew exactly what I was up to and was himself opposed to the mounting costs of the war for young men. I was only vaguely aware that my coevals were doing just what I was doing, and in numbers. Draft-resister groups were openly giving advice about legal and quasi-legal means of draft avoidance, and circulating lists of sympathetic doctors and psychiatrists who would write their letters without playing the complicated game I had played with mine. Young men with a grasp of the system studied the Selective Service regs to find their personal loopholes; the young James Fallows, today a respected writer on military and other subjects, managed to get his six-foot self below the Army minimum of 120 pounds by fasting, and then insisted on a redo when the scale showed 122. He escaped, as he has written, "to enjoy those bright prospects I had been taught that life owed me," and went on to graduate school, uncomfortably aware that poor and working-class boys just out of high school would disproportionately serve, go to Vietnam, and see combat.

History then granted a moral dimension to such self-regarding acts of avoidance and evasion by staging a gigantic act of public defiance. Many who faced the draft in those years accepted the consequences of open refusal, sacrificing personal hopes and plans, serving terms in prison, or devoting themselves to helping others defeat a system and a national project that they regarded as criminally wrong. Young men who openly burned their draft cards or left for Canada were risking their futures, and they knew it; some believed a future was unfolding that wouldn't care and might even approve what they had done, but it still took nerve. Compounding fraud with felony, at little risk to myself I burned my own IV-F draft card on the steps of the

Pentagon in 1967, not long before the magic-power chanting of the encircling Yippies lifted the whole building several feet off the ground.

In the years following the American disengagement from Vietnam, the cultivation of personal growth and self-actualization was among the traits most noticed, and worried about, by sociologists and pundits. The refusal of military service by upwardly mobile, educated young people was thought to reflect a refusal of any kind of service except to the self. This was the Me Generation, a characterization that (as is common in sociological punditry) ignored the majority who did their duty, who went to church and to work, and who respected teachers and officials more or less as before. More important, it missed the many who then and later took up service to others, including in the Peace Corps, which Richard Nixon called a "haven for draft dodgers" and a "cult of escapism," and in VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), which was founded in 1965 as a domestic counterpart to the Peace Corps.

A narrow self-regard that accepts only conditional restraints on personal possibility is the exclusive possession of no single generation. A conscious sense of one's self as having a unique destiny demands a search for ways of living and acting that realize that uniqueness. But self-fulfillment can be and very often is found in selfless service to others. Goethe's Faust, after a long life of self-seeking—for knowledge, for experience, for love—finds real satisfaction helping his countrymen to drain a swamp and create new land, at last forgetting himself.

My avoidance of service to my country has been retrospectively rewritten by the catastrophe that ensued in Vietnam: I didn't serve in that war, and nobody should have had to. (Those who did serve and saw combat may have a different account.) But why was I immune for so long to the pull of service of any kind, service as goal and as personal value? It wasn't just service to my nation or the world. Teachers—the good ones—

serve students. Fathers serve families. Workers retire from businesses with thanks and a 401(k) after a lifetime of service. In none of these realms could I place my future self.

My own conversations with Me-phistopheles always had to do with getting what I wanted, even if what I wanted were goods and achievements that required long years of labor in near poverty and solitude. Not until I was past forty and found myself engaged in a conversation about karma—that central word of the Me Generation's search for themselves—did I perceive the matter clearly. I don't care about my karma anymore, I said, if I ever did: I want to know what my dharma is. I wanted to know, at last and henceforward, what I should do, and to learn how to do it.

Very soon thereafter, as though my wish had been overheard, life presented me with a whole series of responsibilities to take up because I should, and surrenders of self to make because I must. These had nothing to do with the nation particularly, or with the people of the world in general, but they required service to others, which I have tried to give, and have, mostly, been glad to give, when I could figure out how.

The end of compulsory military service and the establishment of a volunteer armed forces didn't erase the injustices and inequities of the Vietnam-era draft. Combat troops today are largely composed of those who are entering adulthood with the fewest options. Fallows notes in an article that appeared earlier this year in *The Atlantic* that while veterans are showered with praise and admiration, and are universally celebrated as the heroes of our otherwise divisive wars, very few people who have other possibilities think of joining them. Throughout the Iraq involvement, Representative Charles Rangel urged a bill that would reinstate the draft—mandating two years of service for all young men and women "in any capacity that promotes our national defense"—and thus "compel the American public to be part of the shared sacrifice and moral issues at hand." It's hard to imagine a bill that would alter the social landscape more, or one less likely to pass. ■



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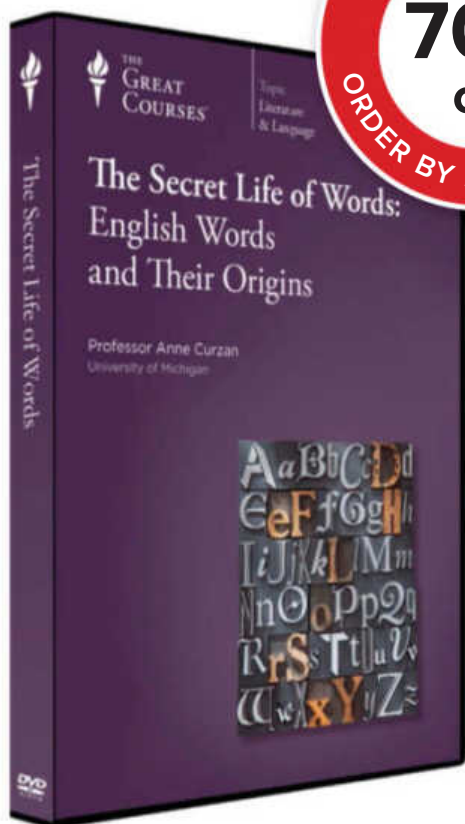


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 - Number that China is : 1
- Percentage of the world's cigarettes that are consumed by China : 44
- Portion of children in rural China who have been left behind by one or both parents seeking work in cities : 2/5
 - Percentage of teenagers in Utah who live with their married biological parents : 57
 - Of teenagers in Mississippi : 32
- Percentage change since 2000 in the rate of severe depression among U.S. children and teenagers : -16
 - Portion of newly formed heterosexual couples who meet online : 1/5
 - Of newly formed homosexual couples : 3/5
- Factor by which white heterosexual U.S. women are more likely than other U.S. women to receive fertility assistance : 2
 - Portion of Americans who support legally mandated paid family leave : 4/5
 - Percentage of workers worldwide who do not have permanent jobs : 75
- Chance that a white American aged 16 to 24 is neither working nor in school : 1 in 10
 - That a black American in that age group is : 1 in 5
- Percentage of Americans who say that the ability to speak English is an important part of being a "true American" : 66
 - Who say that belief in God is : 52
- Portion of black Americans who view the Confederate battle flag primarily as a symbol of racism : 3/4
 - Of white Americans who do : 1/4
- Confirmed number of Americans aged 112 or older : 10
- Number that age listed as alive on Social Security rolls : 4,700,000
- Minimum number of people admitted to U.S. emergency rooms in 2012 with injuries from texting : 2,594
 - Weight, in pounds, of the average American man in 1960 : 168
 - Of the average American woman today : 166
- Factor by which Americans are more likely to be killed by a cow than by a shark : 27
- Percentage change in the annual number of bottlenose dolphins beached on the Gulf Coast since the 2010 BP oil spill : +65
 - Length, in feet, of a motorized killer whale used to scare sea lions away from a dock in Oregon : 32
 - Minutes after its first launch in June that the whale capsized : 20

*Figures cited are the latest available as of July 2015. Sources are listed on page 83.
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If it seems as if English is changing all around you, you're right. It's evident in newer words such as "bling" and "email," and from the loss of old forms such as "shall." But does this mean our language is in decay—or is change just the natural order of things? **The Secret Life of Words** answers this question by presenting the fascinating history behind the everyday words in our lexicon.

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READINGS

[Commencement Address]

THE GENEALOGY OF ORALS

By Friedrich Nietzsche, from Anti-Education, which will be published in November by New York Review Books. The volume gathers five lectures on “the future of our educational institutions” that the philosopher presented at Basel’s city museum in 1872, when he was twenty-seven and a professor of philology. The lectures take the form of a fictional dialogue. Here, the voice is that of the cantankerous “old philosopher” who is the conversation’s main speaker. A Gymnasium is an elite secondary school. Translated from the German by Damion Searls.

When someone from abroad wants to learn about our university system, his first pressing question is: How do your students participate in university life? We answer: By means of the ear—they take part as listeners. The foreigner is amazed and asks: Purely by listening? Purely by listening, we repeat. The student attends lectures. The teacher speaks to listening students. Anything else he may think or do remains inaccessible, cut off from the listeners by a monstrous chasm. In general, the professor wants as many students in attendance as possible, but, if need be, he makes do with few. One speaking mouth plus

many ears and half as many writing hands: that is the academic system as seen from outside—the educational machinery of the university in action.

The possessor of the mouth is separated from, and independent of, the possessors of those many ears. This independence is glorified as “academic freedom.” To make for even greater freedom, the one can more or less say whatever he wants, and the others can more or less listen to whatever they want—except that in the background, a discreet distance away, stands the state watching with a certain supervisory look on its face, making sure to remind everybody from time to time that it is the aim, the purpose, the essence of this whole strange process.

Since the listening is a matter of personal judgment for the independent-minded student, and since this student can refuse to believe anything he hears, can deny it all authority, the educational process is, strictly speaking, left in his own hands. Oh happy age, when the young are wise and educated enough to teach *themselves* how to walk! Oh incomparable Gymnasiums, cultivating independence where other eras believed in cultivating dependence, discipline, subordination, and obedience—believed in resisting every delusion of independence with all their might! Now you see why, from the standpoint of education, I regard today’s university as a mere extension of the Gymnasium. Do not let the Gymnasium graduate fool you: believing

himself to have received the blessings of education, he remains a schoolboy shaped by his

[Tract]

MAO'S LITTLE FACEBOOK

From an announcement posted in April to China Youth International, a website operated by China's Communist Youth League. In February, the organization launched Operation Sunshine Comments, a campaign to convince young people to post positively about the party on Chinese social-media outlets such as Weibo, and to report any "unhealthy" online activity they witness. Translated from the Chinese by Jamie Fisher.

Y oung people of every era have had their historic missions. Before the New Culture Movement, twenty-seven-year-old Li Dazhao proposed "advancing civilization for the world, creating prosperity for mankind." During the War of Resistance against Japan, Zhao Yiman irrigated China with blood. During the War of Liberation, Jiang Zhuyun blossomed unbowed in an autumn wind so that we could welcome the dawn of a new era. During the period of Peaceful Construction, Lei Feng bequeathed to us a great love from his bosom and his selfless spirit. In the Information Age, the Digital Youth should spare no effort to realize the mighty fulfillment of the Chinese Dream.

As the flag bearers of Internet Civilization, they must shoulder a courageous responsibility. This means taking initiative and sounding a bloody rallying cry when the nation's Internet sovereignty is assaulted, and confronting the cacophonous noise of the Internet and its evil social trends by boldly meeting great difficulties with swords bared and charging at the critical moment with blood boiling. Our young people are the children of the forward march, the pillars of the state, and the future of the Internet. Only when cyberspace is clean and radiant will all young people be able to satiate themselves with the sweet beauty of Internet youth, to bathe in the bounties of Digital Youth. The beauty of youth, when they hoist the flag of Internet civilization! This is a sacred task, a vast undertaking, an arduous duty—truly "the burden is heavy and the road is long." Let us resolve to move forward, to build together a towering, lush, clean Internet, to strive toward a flourishing, promising youth!

teacher's hands. In academic isolation, having left the Gymnasium, he is now beyond the reach of any guidance, living from that point forward entirely free and on his own.

Free! Put this freedom to the test, you connoisseurs of human nature! A freedom built on the crumbling foundations and soft soil of today's Gymnasium education stands crooked, vulnerable to the breath of the whirling tempest. Take a good look at this free student, the herald of independent higher education, and divine him by his instincts, know him by his needs! What will you think of his education when you measure it by the following three yardsticks: his need for philosophy, his instinct for art, and, finally, the standard of Greek and Roman antiquity—the categorical imperative of all culture?

We are so beset by serious, difficult problems that, when brought to see them correctly, we acquire a lasting philosophical wonder. Only in this fertile soil can a deeper, nobler education grow. Most often, it is a person's own experience that brings him face-to-face with such problems. Especially in tempestuous youth, almost every personal incident shimmers in a double reflection: as an instance of everyday triviality and as an example of an eternal, mysterious problem that cries out for an answer. At that age, when we see our experiences ringed with metaphysical rainbows, as it were, our need for a guiding hand is at its peak. A young person has suddenly and almost instinctively learned the double meaning of existence and at the same time lost the firm footing of beliefs and received opinions he once cherished.

Clearly, the beloved independence that today's educated young person is groomed for could not be more opposed to such a need for guidance. Young men "of the modern age" are eager to suppress, indeed to crush, this need, to divert it or deform it, and their favorite method for paralyzing such a natural philosophical impulse is through so-called historical education.

Historical, in fact philological, considerations have slowly but surely taken the place of profound explorations of eternal problems. The question becomes: What did this or that philosopher think or not think? And is this or that text rightly ascribed to him or not? And even: Is this variant of a classical text preferable to that other? Students in university seminars today are encouraged to occupy themselves with such emasculated inquiries. As a result, of course, *philosophy itself* is banished from the university altogether.



Before Flight, a painting by Robert Bubel, whose work was on view in May at Pasaż, in Krakow.

As for how the university stands in relation to art, the truth cannot be admitted without shame—the two stand in no relation whatsoever. Not a trace of artistic thinking, learning, striving, or comparative analysis is to be found there. No one can seriously claim that the university lifts its voice to advance important national artistic projects. An individual professor may happen to feel a personal inclination for art, or an endowed chair may be established for aesthetic literary historians, but that is not the point—the university as a whole does not and cannot impose strict artistic discipline on the young people in its charge. It simply lets happen whatever happens, willy-nilly.

Our “independent” academics lead their lives without philosophy, without art: why, then, would they want anything to do with the Greeks and Romans, whom no one has to pretend to respect anymore, and who, remote and nearly inaccessible, sit enthroned in majestic strangeness? The universities of today quite logically don’t bother with this now-extinct sense of regret. But take away the Greeks (never mind the Romans), together with philosophy and art, and where is the ladder you can use to ascend to a true education?

If you are honest, and honestly accept this threefold insight—if you admit that today’s



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MILLER YEZERSKI GALLERY, BOSTON

"Cups no. 3," a photograph from the series *Emergent Behavior*, by Thomas Jackson, whose work was on view in August at Miller Yezerski Gallery, in Boston.

students are unprepared for and unsuited to philosophy, lack any artistic instincts, and are mere barbarians with delusions of freedom compared with the Greeks—then you will not flee from these students in disgust, although you might well want to avoid coming too closely in contact with them. For the condition of such a student is *not his fault*. The kind of creature you have recognized him to be is merely a silent yet terrible rebuke to those who are truly to blame.

You have to understand the secret language of this innocent weighed down with guilt: only then will you be able to understand the inner nature of the independence he so likes to show to the outside world. Not one of these nobly equipped young men has escaped the restless,

exhausting, confusing, debilitating crisis of education: he may seem to be the only free man in a world of bureaucrats and slaves, but he pays for this splendid illusion with constant and ever-growing doubts and torments. He feels that he cannot guide himself, cannot help himself—and then he dives hopelessly into the world of everyday life and daily routine, he is immersed in the *most trivial activity possible*, and his limbs grow weak and weary. Suddenly, he pulls himself together; vigorous as ever, he feels the strength that might keep him afloat. Proud and noble resolutions form and grow within him. He is terrified of sinking so soon into the narrow confines of professionalism, and he grabs at struts and supports so as not to be swept downstream. But for naught! The sup-

ports give way: he has grasped at the wrong thing, tried to hold fast to fragile reeds. In a low and despondent mood, he sees his plans go up in smoke—his condition is sickening and humiliating—he vacillates between exaggerated, bustling activity and melancholy sluggishness. Tired, lazy, afraid of work, shrinking back from everything great, full of self-hatred, he analyzes his own abilities and finds, when he peers into himself, only a hollow void or chaotic mess. Then he plummets once more from the heights of imagined self-knowledge into ironic skepticism. He sees his struggles as meaningless. He declares himself ready for any task, however low and humble, so long as it is real and useful. Now he seeks consolation in frantic, incessant busyness—anything behind which he can hide from himself. And so his perplexity, his lack of a leader to guide him, drives him from one way of life to another. Doubt, elation, affliction, hope, despair, everything hurls him this way and that. All the stars that he might have used to steer his ship have gone out.

That is how this famous independence, this academic freedom, looks when seen through the fate of the best souls, those with the deepest need for education. Compared with them, the cruder and more easygoing natures, who enjoy their freedom in the purely barbaric sense, count for nothing. With their low pleasures and premature professional narrowness, they fit perfectly into this so-called freedom—who would deny it? Their satisfaction, though, does not outweigh the suffering of even a single young man drawn to culture, who, in need of a guide, at last gets discouraged, lets drop the reins, and begins to despise himself. *He* is the guiltless innocent. For who weighed him down with the unbearable burden of standing alone? Who urged him to be independent, at an age when the desire to devote oneself to a great leader, to follow enthusiastically in a master's footsteps, is practically a person's most urgent and natural need?

It is troubling to think about what happens when this need is so violently crushed. Anyone who looks long and hard at the most dangerous friends and advocates of today's despicable pseudoculture will too often find men who have suffered this degenerate and derailed education, now driven by inner desperation to a furious rage against a culture that no one was willing to show them how to reach. It is not the worst men, not the lowest, whom we later meet as journalists and feuilletonists after they have undergone the metamorphosis of despair; certain well-groomed literary types these days might well be characterized as essentially desperate students. Here we have a

desire for culture that has gone to seed, as it were, and is finally driven to cry out: *I am culture, I am!*

It is frightening indeed to see that our whole educated reading public bears the mark of this degeneration. When our educated men ceaselessly read journalists, and even cooperate in their work of corrupting the people, we have no choice but to suppose that their erudition is functioning for them much as writing novels functions for others: as a flight from themselves, a desperate self-annihilation, an ascetic strangulation of their own cultural drive. The same sigh gushes forth from our degenerate literature and the senselessly bloated book-scribbling of our scholars: How could we have so lost sight of ourselves? But the effort fails. Whole mountains of printed pages are shoveled on but memory refuses to be stifled, and every so often it repeats the

[Decree]

MODEST PROPOSALS

From a list of rules the Islamic State has imposed within territories it has claimed since 2013. Translated from the Arabic by Asma Ghribi.

- Pigeon-breeding is prohibited
- Smoking hookah is prohibited
- Eating Turkish meat is prohibited
- The price of counterfeit goods must be lower than the price of the original product
- Wearing Nike apparel is prohibited
- The use of Apple devices is prohibited
- Playing foosball is permissible only if it does not involve gambling and if the heads of the players have been removed
- Skinny jeans are prohibited: men must wear loose-fitting pants with hems below the ankle
- Wearing apparel bearing any of the following words or phrases is prohibited: "flirt," "hussy," "cupid," "whore," "vixen," "Madonna," "chorus girl," "I'm a pretty bitch"
- A female nurse and a male doctor must not be left alone without a male chaperone or a group of women
- Women who are over the age of fifty are permitted to travel within Islamic State territory without a male chaperone
- It is permissible to take an apostate organ to save a Muslim life

refrain: “A man of degenerate culture! Born to education, and raised in miseducation! Helpless barbarian, slave to the present, lying in the chains of the passing moment, and hungering—always, eternally hungering!”

[Materials and Methods]

QUESTIONABLE BALL

From an investigative report commissioned by the National Football League and released in May. The league hired Exponent, an engineering-consulting company, to determine whether footballs used by the New England Patriots during the American Football Conference Championship Game against the Indianapolis Colts, on January 18, 2015, were intentionally deflated below the NFL's pressure standards.

MAY 6, 2015

Subject: Ball-Deflation Timing Investigation
Exponent Project No. 1500736.000

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Thirteen exemplar footballs of known initial pressure were placed into an equipment bag believed to be similar, if not identical, to the bag used by the Patriots on the day of the AFC Championship Game. An individual carried the bag into an enclosed room that measured 76 inches by 98 inches. The door used to ingress/egress the room opened inward, with a latching lever. Once inside, the subject, who had possession of a standard inflation needle, closed the door and attempted to insert the needle into all thirteen balls in as short a time as possible. After partially deflating all thirteen balls, the subject unzipped the bag and exited the room. Three subjects independently performed the above procedure.

CONCLUSIONS

With minimal training (a single practice run), it is possible for an individual using a standard sports-ball inflation needle to perform the following in approximately 60–70 seconds: open a door and enter a room, close the door, open a zippered bag containing thirteen footballs, insert the needle into all footballs—releasing a small amount of air from each—close and zip the bag containing the footballs, and leave, closing the door behind.

Oh, these miserable innocents who are held to account! There is something they do not have, the lack of which every last one of them must have felt: a true educational institution, which could provide them with proper goals, masters, methods, models, companions, and the invigorating, uplifting breath of the true German spirit streaming up from within it. Instead, these creatures waste away in the wilderness; they devolve into enemies of the very spirit that is, at bottom, so like their own; they heap guilt upon guilt, more than any generation ever has, sully what is pure, desecrating what is holy, canonizing what is false and fake. In them you can see what power our universities have to shape culture.

Ask yourself, in all seriousness: What is it that you are promoting with these institutions? German erudition, German ingenuity, the honest German drive for knowledge, German industriousness capable of any sacrifice—splendid and beautiful things, the envy of other nations, the most splendid and beautiful things in the world, in fact, as long as that other, true German spirit spreads above them like a dark thundercloud, aflash with lightning and bursting with the fruitful benediction of the rain. Instead, you live in fear of that spirit, and thus it is a heavy and oppressive fog that has gathered around your universities, and in this miasma your noble young scholars breathe heavily and laboriously, and the best of them perish.

[Critique]

ENLIGHTENMENT ERROR

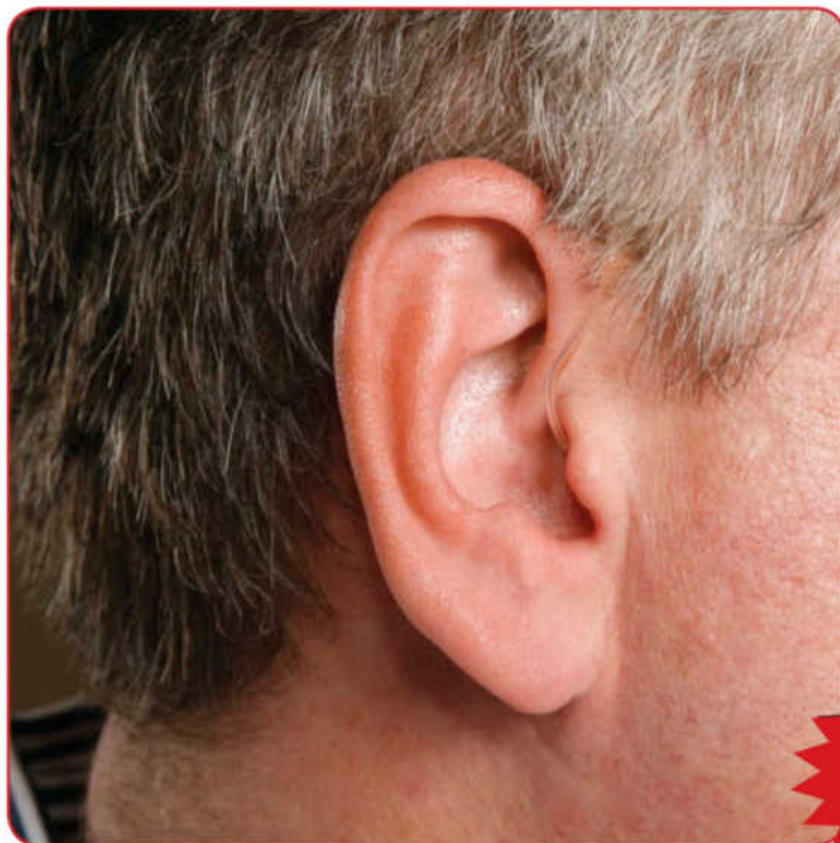
By Orin S. Kerr, from the Spring 2015 issue of The Green Bag, a journal edited by Ross Davies, who is a professor at the George Mason University School of Law. During an interview at the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals annual conference in June 2011, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts said that if you “pick up a copy of any law review . . . the first article is likely to be, you know, the influence of Immanuel Kant on evidentiary approaches in eighteenth-century Bulgaria, or something, which I’m sure was of great interest to the academic that wrote it, but isn’t of much help to the bar.” Kerr is a professor of law at George Washington University.

Chief Justice Roberts has drawn attention to the influence of Immanuel Kant on evidentiary

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"Barrow Cabin 07," a diptych by Eirik Johnson from his series depicting seasonal hunting cabins built by the Iñupiat of Barrow, Alaska.

approaches in eighteenth-century Bulgaria. No scholarship has analyzed Kant's influence in that context. This article fills the gap in the literature by exploring Kant's influence on evidentiary approaches in eighteenth-century Bulgaria. It concludes that Kant's influence, in all likelihood, was none.

Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 and died in 1804. He lived most of his life in Königsberg, Prussia, a city on the Baltic Sea, on the northern tip of Europe. Kant's influence did not extend to Bulgaria, a thousand miles to the south, until long after his death. Kant first became influential in Bulgarian philosophy circles in the second half of the nineteenth century. The earliest reference to Kant's work in a Bulgarian journal appeared

in 1859. That reference dismissed his ideas as "obscure and awkward."

Even if Kant had influenced Bulgarian philosophers in the eighteenth century, it seems unlikely that such influence could have extended to the legal system. During the eighteenth century, Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire. Its legal system derived from a mixture of sharia law, feudal practices, and the customary law of local ethnicities that was permitted by the Ottomans. European thought in general had little influence on the Bulgarian legal system until Bulgaria became an independent state in 1908.

The possibility of Kantian influence on the field of evidence law is particularly remote. Kant's legal views are difficult to summarize, as they bear no direct relationship to the cate-



gorical imperative for which he is best known in philosophy. But however one assesses Kant's writings about law, they primarily concerned matters of legal philosophy rather than trial procedure. Kant's work addressed topics such as the nature of property, contracts, and the proper limits of punishment. He also wrote about the proper conditions of a republican constitution and democratic government. It appears that Kant never wrote about evidence law, which concerns the procedures for establishing facts in a legal proceeding.

Finally, a study of Bulgarian evidence law in the eighteenth century suggests no Kantian influence. According to a treatise on the Bulgarian law of procedure in the Ottoman period, eyewitness testimony taken under oath was the primary form of trial testimony.

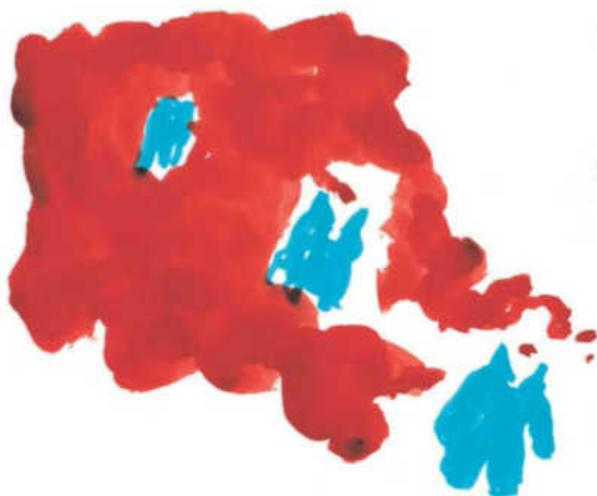
Relatives of the accused were not permitted to testify. Women could testify, although children were allowed to testify only in cases involving border disputes over land plots. According to one account, the custom was to bring children to the relevant plot and then painfully pull their hair to ensure that they would remember the borders and be able to testify about them in court. Confessions were considered the best evidence of guilt in criminal cases, even though it was common for confessions to be obtained under torture or threat of violence.

There is no apparent connection between these rules and Immanuel Kant. For all of these reasons, it appears very likely that Kant had no influence on evidentiary approaches in eighteenth-century Bulgaria.

[Illustration]

LIPSTICK

By Luz, from *Catharsis*, his memoir about the terrorist attack on the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January. Luz, a cartoonist for the magazine, was late to work on the day of the attack. *Catharsis* was published in May by Futuropolis. Translated from the French by Edward Gauvin.



© Futuropolis

[Memoir]

WHERE NUMBERS BECOME FLESH

From Gamelife, by Michael Clune, out this month from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Clune is also the author of White Out, an account of his heroin addiction.

I—we—were on a grassy field of breathtaking beauty. A forest surrounded us.

“W” moved us forward. “A” turned us left. “D” turned us right.

We turned around on the field. Our view occupied the upper left quarter of the screen. The bottom half was filled with the statistics of the party—hit points, armor points, spell points, current weapons. The upper right quarter was currently blank but would soon be filled with the statistics of the enemy forces we faced, the scrolling numeric readout of the battles, and various verbal messages the game had for us.

The upper left corner was what I saw. The upper right corner was what I knew. The bottom half was what I was made of.

It took me a few hours to get used to this new body. But after that, my soul never chafed in it. All you really need for a good body is something that sees, something that knows, and some numbers underneath.

As we stared in wonder at the pure green of the grass, a group of five goblins made out of giant gray pixels approached and attacked us. Battle! First it was their turn.

—Goblin strikes Eric and *misses*.

—Goblin strikes Eric and *misses*.

—Goblin strikes Eric and *hits* for 7 points of damage, leather shield blocks 4.

—Goblin fires an arrow at Jenny and *misses*.

Then it was our turn. Eric’s name was blinking. I looked at the game manual. I pressed [space] to make Eric attack with his current weapon.

—Eric strikes goblin and *hits* for 8 points of damage. One goblin dies.

A small quantity of VICTORY dripped into my bloodstream. I jerked in my chair, grinning nervously. It was a new feeling for me. At age eleven you haven’t had many opportunities to triumph over your enemies. After the next goblin went down, I felt it again. Wow.

After a couple hours I learned that my new body was capable of three feelings: VICTORY, DEFEAT, and FRUSTRATION. This might seem like too few to you who can also feel ENVY, BOREDOM, FEAR, and LOVE. But if you have seen black-and-white movies, you know

that two colors can make a pretty decent world. Similarly, if you’re having three feelings hard and often, you don’t really miss the other four.

We wandered around killing a few giant wolves, a few more goblins, and a party of dark elves. VICTORY ticked in my heart. I found a helmet on one of the dark elves and put it on Eric and his armor points went up. Now Eric had a 75 percent chance of blocking 6 points of damage. VICTORY is not just fun. It actually makes you stronger. We headed east through the forest. Beyond the forest rose the walls of a city. Just outside the city, we encountered the long, green, shapeless mass of a troll. It attacked.

—Troll strikes Eric and *hits* for 490 damage. Eric dies.

—Troll strikes James and *hits* for 462 damage. James dies.

—Troll strikes Jenny and *hits* for 512 damage. Jenny dies.

My veins ran black with DEFEAT.

DEFEAT enters the bloodstream in a fine black dust of pulverized numbers. It is unpleasant. It is in fact more toxic than death, which is after all temporary and can be immediately erased by pressing the [enter] key upon dying, thus loading the game from the last time you saved your progress. Multiple deaths in rapid succession, however, bring the real risk of FRUSTRATION.

FRUSTRATION is the slow expansion of a zero in the artery of the computer role-playing-game body. Zero—the empty number, round gate leading from the fantasy of numbers to the world of numberless people. Further deaths will cause the zero to swell and swell until it gets large enough for the rhythms of a *human body* to be felt inside the game body.

The stiffness of my spine in the hard wooden chair. The pressure in my bladder.

When the zero gets large enough, swollen with dozens and dozens of deaths, you can actually see your human hands on the keyboard. You can see the thick late-December sun pushing through the slats of the blinds. And now an alien feeling, BOREDOM, beats in the very numbers of the game.

The true death is almost here, and now through the zero of FRUSTRATION you experience the FEAR of the true death.

If, however, at its widest point, the zero of FRUSTRATION is lanced by VICTORY, then the spiky rune of VICTORY gets pushed up your veins through the pleasure-giving membranes of a collapsed zero. It enters the heart like a comet.

Why does fantasy with numbers *work* and *last* and *move* when fantasy without numbers

sits and dribbles and whines? Think about ordinary, numberless fantasy. There is nothing more natural and human than fantasy. The baby sits in its diaper fantasizing a breast. The phantom breast is the baby's first experience of its natural ability to create something that is not there. Human flesh is the quarry of worlds. The baby already has enough flesh to create a fantasy mother. Look! There it is. The baby's

[Poem]

QUICK TRIP

By Geoffrey G. O'Brien, from *Literary Hub*. O'Brien is the author of four books of poetry, including, most recently, *People on Sunday* (Wave Books).

It was just a time of matter, that zone
Between running and stopping
Bred of gas and twilight
Where all speech is eloquent
As the outlines of cars and stores.
Always just twilight, hence speech
Always eloquent, caught between
Massing and dispersal. The oppressed
Possess the eloquence of eloquence
While you others have its awkwardness.
I hear fall will come, but not for any of us.
I hear it will be here, but not as we
Would have it, a burning tire,
Driverless rains that seem commanded
Because of such economy as is.
All scenes are hunting scenes.
There's no good way to be, we must
Not say so. Nothing to do
But kick yourself down the service road,
A forgotten lane, flat on the ground
Or against a brick wall, slammed there
Temporarily, rights draining
Like a crowd gone quiet, so it is said.
Poetry would have you believe that
Words are acronyms while the state
That acronyms are words. You can't
Yet be rescued from this earth.
So the suburbs politely burn
And the ring road, the QTs.
It will happen again means
The bad is still happening and the good
At least one street over
Wherever that loud bass is,
A verdict known before it comes.
I hear of it from as far as my lap.

natural response to its act of creation is to cry. So much for unaided fantasy.

But what does it take for the baby to drink from the fantasy breast?

What does it take for the human to take up residence in the world of fantasy? To breathe unreal air? Walk on unreal ground? Eat unreal apples?

We find clues in the way the human being breathes real air, walks on real ground, eats real apples. The human depends on the inhuman. The human depends on the inhuman for its grip on the world. Inside every human face that crumples in sudden sorrow is a skull that grins. Unfeeling bone supports every hug. The ancient, primitive-mollusk suction-and-release of our orifices gives our words breath and makes our thoughts go. Human feeling leans on the inhuman. Human feeling advances into the world leaning on the stick of inhumanity.

So if you want to move into the world of fantasy, you need the support of the inhuman. Something in or under your fantasy that is not you, that is not like you, that does not like you. The addition and subtraction of numbers. The multiplication and division of numbers. Put the rule of numbers in your fantasy like a spine of bone and you will walk out into what is not there. Let addition and subtraction be the suction-and-release of your fantasy body and you will breathe unreality and speak magic. Lean on the rule of numbers like a cane of bone and you will shuffle out of space and time.

I will tell you what it feels like to be immortal.

The past is full of VICTORY. The present is full of numbers. The future is full of VICTORY.

Some people might say that this game immortality isn't real immortality. They might say game immortality is just mortality's weak fantasy. You die and live again in the game, okay, they might say. But then you get up from your chair, the power goes out, the phone rings, morning comes, you fall asleep and fall out of the game and you're the same mortal human as everyone else. You don't stay in the game. You can't stay in the game. You can't die forever in the game, but because you can't stay in the game forever you can die forever. Game immortality isn't genuine immortality.

Except it is. You can be immortal for a little while. Every religion and myth system and folklore tradition contains examples of beings who were immortal and became mortal, or who were mortal and became immortal. Think of Jesus or Arwen. Religion proves that the idea of temporary immortality isn't nonsensical. The Bard's Tale II proves that it's possible.



Photographs of an artificial-flower seller (top) and an inflatable-toy seller (bottom) at China Commodity City, in Yiwu, China, by Richard John Seymour.

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THE NEOLIBERAL ARTS

How college sold its soul to the market

By William Deresiewicz

I recently spent a semester teaching writing at an elite liberal-arts college. At strategic points around the campus, in shades of yellow and green, banners displayed the following pair of texts. The first was attributed to the college's founder, which dates it to the 1920s. The second was extracted from the latest version of the institution's mission statement:

The paramount obligation of a college is to develop in its students the ability to think clearly and independently, and the ability to live confidently, courageously, and hopefully.

leadership
service
integrity
creativity

Let us take a moment to compare these texts. The first thing to observe about the older one is that it is a sentence. It expresses an idea by placing concepts in relation to one another within the kind of structure that we call a syntax. It is, moreover, highly wrought: a parallel structure underscored by repetition, five adverbs balanced two against three.

A spatial structure, the sentence also suggests a temporal sequence. Thinking clearly, it wants us to recognize, leads to thinking independently. Thinking independently leads to living confidently. Living confidently leads to living courageously. Living courageously leads to living hopefully. And the entire chain begins with a college that recognizes it has an obligation to its students, an obligation to develop their abilities to think and live.

Finally, the sentence is attributed to an individual. It expresses her convictions and ideals. It announces that she is prepared to hold herself accountable for certain responsibilities.

The second text is not a sentence. It is four words floating in space, unconnected to one another or to any other concept. Four words—four slogans, really—whose meaning and function are left undefined, open to whatever interpretation the reader cares to project on them.

Four words, three of which—"leadership," "service," and "creativity"—are the loudest buzzwords in contemporary higher education. ("Integrity"

William Deresiewicz's most recent book, Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life (Free Press), is now out in paperback.

NEOLIBERALISM TELLS YOU THAT
YOU ARE VALUABLE ONLY IN
TERMS OF YOUR ACTIVITY IN
THE MARKETPLACE—YOUR
GETTING AND SPENDING

is presumably intended as a synonym for the more familiar “character,” which for colleges at this point means nothing more than not cheating.) The text is not the statement of an individual; it is the emanation of a bureaucracy. In this case, a literally anonymous bureaucracy: no one could tell me when this version of the institution’s mission statement was formulated, or by whom. No one could even tell me who had decided to hang those banners all over campus. The sentence from the founder has also long been mounted on the college walls. The other words had just appeared, as if enunciated by the zeitgeist.

But the most important thing to note about the second text is what it doesn’t talk about: thinking or learning. In what it both does and doesn’t say, it therefore constitutes an apt reflection of the current state of higher education. College is seldom about thinking or learn-

Ting anymore. Everyone is running around trying to figure out what it is about. So far, they have come up with buzzwords, mainly those three.

his is education in the age of neoliberalism. Call it Reaganism or Thatcherism, economism or market fundamentalism, neoliberalism is an ideology that reduces all values to money values. The worth of a thing is the price of the thing. The worth of a person is the wealth of the person. Neoliberalism tells you that you are valuable exclusively in terms of your activity in the marketplace—in Wordsworth’s phrase, your getting and spending.

The purpose of education in a neoliberal age is to produce producers. I published a book last year that said that, by and large, elite American universities no longer provide their students with a real education, one that addresses them as complete human beings rather than as future specialists—that enables them, as I put it, to build a self or (following Keats) to become a soul. Of all the responses the book aroused, the most dismaying was this: that so many individuals associated with those institutions said not, “Of course we provide our students with a real education,” but rather, “What is this ‘real education’ nonsense, anyway?”

A representative example came from Steven Pinker, the Harvard psychologist:

Perhaps I am emblematic of everything that is wrong with elite American education, but I have no idea how to get my students to build a self or become a soul. It isn’t taught in graduate school, and in the hundreds of faculty appointments and promotions I have participated in, we’ve never evaluated a candidate on how well he or she could accomplish it.

Pinker is correct. He is emblematic of everything that is wrong with elite American education. David Brooks, responding to both Pinker and myself, laid out the matter very clearly. College, he noted, has three potential purposes: the commercial (preparing to start a career), the cognitive (learning stuff, or better, learning how to think), and the moral (the purpose that is so mysterious to Pinker and his ilk). “Moral,” here, does not mean learning right from wrong. It means developing the ability to make autonomous choices—to determine your own beliefs, independent of parents, peers, and society. To live confidently, courageously, and hopefully.

Only the commercial purpose now survives as a recognized value. Even the cognitive purpose, which one would think should be the center of a college education, is tolerated only insofar as it contributes to the commercial. Everybody knows that the percentage of students majoring in English has plummeted since the 1960s. But the percentage majoring in the physical sciences—physics, chemistry, geology, astronomy, and so forth—has fallen even more, by some 60 percent. As of 2013, only 1.5 percent of students graduated with a degree in one of those subjects, and only 1.1 percent in math. At most colleges, the lion’s share of undergraduates majors in vocational fields: business, communications, education, health. But even at elite institu-

tions, the most popular majors are the practical, or, as Brooks might say, the commercial ones: economics, biology, engineering, and computer science.

It is not the humanities per se that are under attack. It is learning: learning for its own sake, curiosity for its own sake, ideas for their own sake. It is the liberal arts, but understood in their true meaning, as all of those fields in which knowledge is pursued as an end in itself, the sciences and social sciences included. History, sociology, and political-science majors endure the same kind of ritual hazing (“Oh, so you decided to go for the big bucks”) as do people who major in French or philosophy. Governor Rick Scott of Florida has singled out anthropology majors as something that his state does not need more of. Everybody talks about the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and math—but no one’s really interested in science, and no one’s really interested in math: interested in funding them, interested in having their

kids or their constituents pursue careers in them. That leaves technology and engineering, which means (since the second is a subset of the first) it leaves technology.

As for the moral purpose, the notion that college might prepare you for life by inciting contemplation and reflection, it is typically dismissed, in my experience, with one of two historical arguments. The first attributes the idea to the 1960s. The hippies may have been into that sort of navel-gazing, but kids today are too wisened-up to fall for it. The second relegates it to the nineteenth century. Liberal education was a luxury of the leisured class, the WASP aristocracy. When people from the rest of society began to go to college in the twentieth century, they went so that they could climb the economic ladder.

Needless to say, these criticisms cannot both be true, because they contradict each other. In fact, neither is true, though each contains a piece of truth. The moral purpose was important in the Sixties, and it was important in the nineteenth century. But it was also important between and before. It was important from the beginning of higher education in America. Most early American colleges were founded as church-affiliated institutions; molding students’ character was their primary aim. That mission was largely secularized by the early twentieth century, but it was not abandoned. That is why we have, or had, Great Books courses and other humanities and “general education” sequences and requirements. That is why colleges established English departments, began to teach Shakespeare and Melville: precisely to create a liberal curriculum for students who didn’t come from the WASP aristocracy and hadn’t studied Greek and Latin in prep school.

As the country moved to mass higher education—from the land-grant acts of 1862 and 1890 and the establishment of women’s colleges and historically black colleges and universities to the G.I. Bill and the postwar explosion of state university systems—the idea of a liberal education was carried right along. The heyday of public higher ed, the 1960s, was the heyday of the liberal arts. If those middle- and working-class kids were going to college just to get a better job, why did so many of them major in English? Because they also wanted to learn, think, reflect, and grow. They wanted what the WASP aristocrats had, and the country was wise enough, or generous enough, or egalitarian enough, to let them have it.

A different version of the nineteenth-century argument was made by Joshua Rothman on *The New Yorker’s* website. When I complain about the admissions process at elite colleges, which turns the whole of childhood and adolescence into a high-stakes, twelve-year

IT IS NOT THE HUMANITIES
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THE HISTORICAL MISSION OF
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sprint, what I'm really complaining about, he said, is modernity. We're all going faster and faster, and have been for two hundred years. Students are no exception.

Rothman is wrong, but he is wrong in an illuminating way. Modernity is a condition of ever-increasing acceleration, but only, until recently, for adults. For the young, modernity means—or meant—something different. The modern age, in fact, invented the notion of youth as an interval between childhood and adulthood, and it invented it as a time of unique privileges and obligations. From the Romantics, at the dawn of modernity, all the way through the 1970s, youth was understood to have a special role: to step outside the world and question it. To change it, with whatever opposition from adults. (Hence the association of youth and revolution, another modern institution.) As college became common as a stage of life—one that coincides with the beginning of youth—it naturally incorporated that idea. It was the time to think about the world as it existed, and the world that you wanted to make.

But we no longer have youth as it was imagined by modernity. Now we have youth as it was imagined by postmodernity—in other words, by neoliberalism. Students rarely get the chance to question and reflect anymore—not about their own lives, and certainly not about the world. Modernity understood itself as a condition of constant flux, which is why the historical mission of youth in every generation was to imagine a way forward to a different state. But moving forward to a different state is a possibility that neoliberalism excludes. Neoliberalism believes that we have reached the end of history, a steady-state condition of free-market capitalism that will go on replicating itself forever. The historical mission of youth is no longer desirable or even conceivable. The world is not going to change, so we don't need young people to imagine how it might.

All we need them to do, as Rothman rightly suggests, is to run faster and faster, so that by the time they finish college, they can make the leap into the rat race. Youth, now, is nothing more than a preliminary form of adulthood, and the quiet desperation of middle age has been imported backward into adolescence. (If Arthur Miller had been at work today, it would have been *Death of a Senior*.) And as everybody knows by now, it isn't just postmodern youth; it is also postmodern childhood—for children, too, increasingly are miniature adults, chasing endlessly for rank and status.

This is not inevitable. It is the result of choices we have made, driven by an ideology that we have allowed to impose itself upon us. "So you decided to go for the big bucks," "What are you going to do with that?": the thing I find so striking about those kinds of comments is not that people make them but that they seem to feel compelled to make them. It's as if we've all decided, by unspoken consent, to police our children's aspirations. The attitude hangs in the air, exerting its pressure on students and grown-ups alike. When an adult asks a college student what they're going to do with that, the question that we ought to ask is what's at stake for the adult.

I wrote a book about the problems with elite higher education in America, but what I've learned from the correspondence I've received over the past year is that it's not just *elite* higher education, not just *higher* education, and not just America. I still believe that the selective admissions process is a uniquely baleful institution with uniquely baleful consequences, that liberal-arts colleges are apt to do a better job of providing a real education than research universities, and that there is no necessary correlation between institutional prestige and educational quality. But the most important problems are everywhere, at every level: at small regional col-

leges and large state universities, at prep schools and public high schools, at grade schools and community colleges, in Canada, Britain, Korea, Brazil. They are everywhere because neoliberalism is everywhere.

We see its shadow in the relentless focus on “basic skills” in K–12, as if knowledge were simply an assemblage of methods and facts. In the move to “informational” texts in English classes, as if the purpose of learning to read were to understand a memo. In our various testing regimes, as if all learning could be quantified. In the frenzy of the MOOCs, as if education were nothing more than information transfer. In the tables that rank colleges and majors by average starting salary, as if earning power were the only thing you got from school.

We see it in our president’s swipe, last year, at art-history majors. “I promise you,” said our intellectual in chief, “folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art-history degree.” We see it in Governor Rick Scott’s proposal to charge liberal-arts majors higher tuition at Florida’s state universities. We see it, most spectacularly, in Governor Scott Walker’s attempt to rewrite the mission statement of the University of Wisconsin, one of the country’s great public systems. According to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Walker “proposed striking language about public service and improving the human condition,

and deleting the phrase: ‘Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.’” The university’s mission would henceforth be to “meet the state’s workforce needs.”

A couple of years ago, I sat down with the newly appointed president of a top-ten liberal-arts college. He had come from a professional school (law, in his case), as so many college deans and presidents now seem to.

I started by telling him that I had just visited an upper-level class, and that no one there had been able to give me a decent definition of “leadership,” even though the college trumpeted the term at every opportunity. He declined to offer one himself. Instead, he said, a bit belligerently, “I’ve been here five months, and no one has been able to give me a satisfactory definition of ‘the liberal arts.’”

I offered the one I supplied above: those fields in which knowledge is pursued for its own sake. When you study the liberal arts, I added, what you’re mainly learning to do is make arguments.

“Scientists don’t make arguments,” he said (a statement that would’ve come as a surprise to the scientists on the faculty). “And what about painters? They don’t make arguments.”

I tried to explain the difference between the fine and the liberal arts (the latter are “arts” only by an accident of derivation) with little success. “So what do *you* think the college should be about?” I finally asked him.

“Leadership,” he said.

If college is seldom about thinking and learning anymore, that’s because very few people are interested in thinking and learning, students least of all. As Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa report in *Academically Adrift*, the number of hours per week that students spend studying for their classes has been falling steadily for decades and is now about half of what it was in 1961. And as anyone associated with a college can tell you, ambitious undergraduates devote the bulk of their time and energy, and certainly of their passion, to extracurriculars. Pinker, in the response I mentioned, wonders why he finds himself addressing half-empty lecture halls. I can tell him why: because his students don’t much care about the things he’s trying to teach them.

Why should they, given the messages that they’ve received about their education? The college classroom does or ought to do one thing particularly well, which is to teach you to think analytically. That is why a rigorous college education requires you to be as smart as possible and to think as hard as possible, and why it’s good at training people for those professions that demand the same: law, medicine, finance, consulting, science,

GOVERNOR RICK SCOTT OF FLORIDA PROPOSED CHARGING LIBERAL-ARTS MAJORS HIGHER TUITION AT STATE UNIVERSITIES

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and academia itself. Nor is it a coincidence that the first four of those (the four that also happen to be lucrative) are the top choices among graduates of the most selective schools.

But business, broadly speaking, does not require you to be as smart as possible or to think as hard as possible. It's good to be smart, and it's good to think hard, but you needn't be extremely smart or think extremely hard. Instead, you need a different set of skills: organizational skills, interpersonal skills—things that professors and their classes are certainly not very good at teaching.

As college is increasingly understood in terms of jobs and careers, and jobs and careers increasingly mean business, especially entrepreneurship, students have developed a parallel curriculum for themselves, a parallel college, where they can get the skills they think they really need. Those extracurriculars that students are deserting the classroom for are less and less what Pinker derides as “recreational” and more and more oriented toward future employment: entrepreneurial endeavors, nonprofit ventures, volunteerism. The big thing now on campuses—or rather, off them—is internships.

All this explains a new kind of unhappiness I sense among professors. There are a lot of things about being an academic that basically suck: the committee work, the petty politics, the endless slog for tenure and promotion, the relentless status competition. What makes it all worthwhile, for many people, is the vigorous intellectual dialogue you get to have with vibrant young minds. That kind of contact is becoming unusual. Not because students are dumber than they used to be, but because so few of them approach their studies with a sense of intellectual mission. College is a way, learning is a way, of getting somewhere else. Students will come to your office—rushing in from one activity, rushing off to the next—to find out what they need to do to get a better grade. Very few will seek you out to talk about ideas in an open-ended way. Many professors still do care deeply about thinking and learning. But they often find that they're the only ones.

They certainly cannot count on much support from their administrations. Now that the customer-service mentality has conquered academia, colleges are falling all over themselves to give their students what they think they think they want. Which means that administrators are trying to retrofit an institution that was designed to teach analytic skills—and, not incidentally, to provide young people with an opportunity to reflect on the big questions—for an age that wants a very different set of abilities. That is how the president of a top liberal-arts college can end up telling me that he's not interested in teaching students to make arguments but is interested in leadership. That is why, around the country, even as they cut departments, starve traditional fields, freeze professorial salaries, and turn their classrooms over to adjuncts, colleges and universities are establishing centers and offices and institutes, and hiring coordinators and deanlets, and launching initiatives, and creating courses and programs, for the inculcation of leadership, the promotion of service, and the fostering of creativity. Like their students, they are busy constructing a parallel college. What will happen to the old one now is anybody's guess.

So what's so bad about leadership, service, and creativity? What's bad about them is that, as they're understood on campus and beyond, they are all encased in neoliberal assumptions. Neoliberalism, which dovetails perfectly with meritocracy, has generated a caste system: “winners and losers,” “makers and takers,” “the best and the brightest,” the whole gospel of Ayn Rand and her *Übermenschen*. That's what “leadership” is finally about. There are leaders, and then there is everyone else: the led, presumably—the followers, the little people. Leaders get things done; leaders take command. When colleges promise to make their students leaders, they're telling them they're going to be in charge.

“Service” is what the winners engage in when they find themselves in a benevolent mood. Call it Clintonism, by analogy with Reaganism. Bill Clinton not only ratified the neoliberal consensus as president, he has extended its logic as a former president. Reaganism means the affluent have all the money, as well as all the power. Clintonism means they use their money and power, or a bit of it, to help the less fortunate—because the less fortunate (i.e., the losers) can’t help themselves. Hence the Clinton Foundation, hence every philanthropic or altruistic endeavor on the part of highly privileged, highly credentialed, highly resourced elites, including all those nonprofits or socially conscious for-profits that college students start or dream of starting.

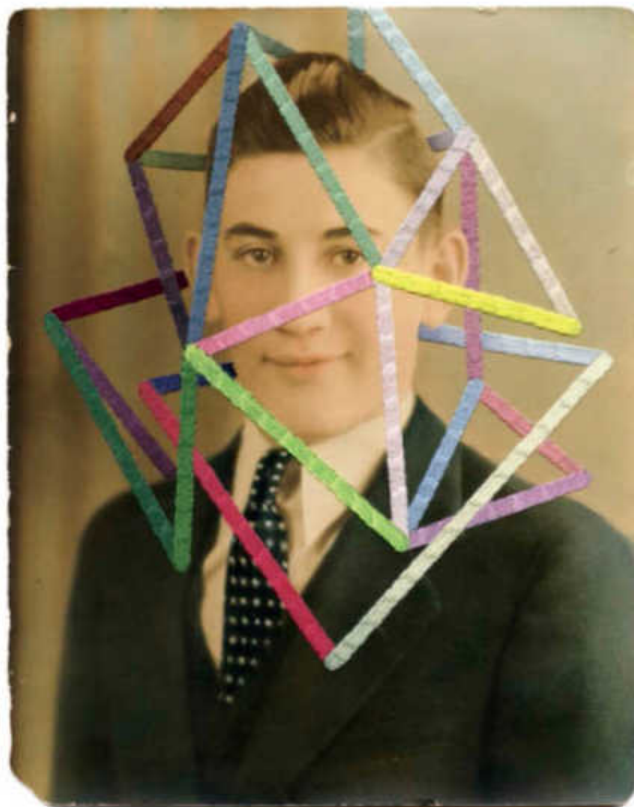
“Creativity,” meanwhile, is basically a business concept, aligned with the other clichés that have come to us from the management schools by way of Silicon Valley: “disruption,” “innovation,” “transformation.” “Creativity” is not about becoming an artist. No one wants you to become an artist. It’s about devising “innovative” products, services, and techniques—“solutions,” which imply that you already know the problem. “Creativity” means design thinking, in the terms articulated by the writer Amy Whitaker, not art thinking: getting from A to a predetermined B, not engaging in an open-ended exploratory process in the course of which you discover the B.

Leadership, service, and creativity do not seek fundamental change (remember, fundamental change is out in neoliberalism); they seek technological or technocratic change within a static social framework, within a market framework. Which is really too bad, because the biggest challenges we face—climate change, resource depletion, the disappearance of work in the face of automation—will require nothing less than fundamental change, a new organization of society. If there was ever a time that we needed young people to imagine a different world, that time is now.

We have always been, in the United States, what Lionel Trilling called a business civilization. But we have also always had a range of counterbalancing institutions, countercultural institutions, to advance a different set of values: the churches, the arts, the democratic tradition itself. When the pendulum has swung too far in one direction (and it’s always the same direction), new institutions or movements have emerged, or old ones have renewed their mission. Education in general, and higher education in particular, has always been one of those institutions. But now the market has become so powerful that it’s swallowing the very things that are supposed to keep it in check. Artists are becoming “creatives.” Journalism has become “the media.” Government is bought and paid for. The prosperity gospel has arisen as one of the most prominent movements in American Christianity. And colleges and universities are acting like businesses, and in the service of businesses.

What is to be done? Those very same WASP aristocrats—enough of them, at least, including several presidents of Harvard and Yale—when facing the failure of their own class in the form of the Great Depression, succeeded in superseding themselves and creating a new system, the meritocracy we live with now. But I’m not sure we possess the moral resources to do the same. The WASPs had been taught that leadership meant putting the collective good ahead of your own. But meritocracy means looking out for number one, and neoliberalism doesn’t believe in the collective. As Margaret Thatcher famously said about society, “There’s no such thing. There are individual men and women, and there are families.” As for elite university presidents, they are little more these

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IN TERMS OF MARKET PURPOSES

days than lackeys of the plutocracy, with all the moral stature of the butler in a country house.

Neoliberalism disarms us in another sense as well. For all its rhetoric of freedom and individual initiative, the culture of the market is exceptionally good at inculcating a sense of helplessness. So much of the language around college today, and so much of the negative response to my suggestion that students ought to worry less about pursuing wealth and more about constructing a sense of purpose for themselves, presumes that young people are the passive objects of economic forces. That they have no agency, no options. That they have to do what the market tells them. A Princeton student literally made this argument to me: If the market is incentivizing me to go to Wall Street, he said, then who am I to argue?

I have also had the pleasure, over the past year, of hearing from a lot of people who are pushing back against the dictates of neoliberal education: starting high schools, starting colleges, creating alternatives to high school and college, making documentaries, launching nonprofits, parenting in different ways, conducting their lives in different ways. I welcome these efforts, but none of them address the fundamental problem, which is that we no longer believe in public solutions. We only believe in market solutions, or at least private-sector solutions: one-at-a-time solutions, individual solutions.

The worst thing about “leadership,” the notion that society should be run by highly trained elites, is that it has usurped the place of “citizenship,” the notion that society should be run by everyone together. Not coincidentally, citizenship—the creation of an informed populace for the sake of maintaining a free society, a self-governing society—was long the guiding principle of education in the United States. To escape from neoliberal education, we must escape from neoliberalism. If that sounds impossible, bear in mind that neoliberalism itself would have sounded impossible as recently as the 1970s. As late as 1976, the prospect of a Reagan presidency was played for laughs on network television.

Instead of treating higher education as a commodity, we need to treat it as a right. Instead of seeing it in terms of market purposes, we need to see it once again in terms of intellectual and moral purposes. That means resurrecting one of the great achievements of postwar American society: high-quality, low- or no-cost mass public higher education. An end to the artificial scarcity of educational resources. An end to the idea that students must compete for the privilege of going to a decent college, and that they then must pay for it.

Already, improbably, we have begun to make that move: in the president’s call in January for free community college, in the plan introduced in April by a group of Democratic senators and representatives to enable students to graduate from college without debt, in a proposal put forth by Senator Bernie Sanders for a tax on Wall Street transactions that would make four-year public institutions free for all. Over the past several years, the minimum wage has been placed near the top of the nation’s agenda, already with some notable successes. Now the same is happening with college costs and college access.

But it isn’t happening by itself. Young people, it turns out, are not helpless in the face of the market, especially not if they act together. Nor are they necessarily content to accept the place that neoliberalism has assigned them. We appear to have entered a renewed era of student activism, driven, as genuine political engagement always is, not by upper-class “concern” but by felt, concrete needs: for economic opportunity, for racial justice, for a habitable future. Educational institutions—reactive, defensive, often all but rudderless—are not offering much assistance with this project, and I don’t believe that students have much hope that they will. The real sense of helplessness, it seems, belongs to colleges and universities themselves. ■

1 8 5 2

AT THE RAGGED SCHOOL

By Charles Dickens

I found my first Ragged School, in an obscure place called West-Street, Saffron-Hill, pitifully struggling for life, under every disadvantage. If I say it is ten years ago, I leave a handsome margin. It had no means, it had no suitable rooms, it derived no power or protection from being recognized by any authority, it attracted within its wretched walls a fluctuating swarm of faces—young in years but youthful in nothing else—that scowled Hope out of countenance. It was held in a low-roofed den, in a sickening atmosphere, in the midst of taint, and dirt, and pestilence: with all the deadly sins let loose, howling and shrieking at the doors. Zeal did not supply the place of method and training; the teachers knew little of their office; the pupils, with an evil sharpness, found them out, got the better of them, derided them, made blasphemous answers to scriptural questions, sang, fought, danced, robbed one another; seemed possessed by legions of devils. The place was stormed and carried, over and over again; the lights were blown out, the books strewn in the gutters, and the female scholars carried off triumphantly to their old wickedness.

With no strength in it but its purpose, the school stood it all out and made its way. Some two years since, I found it, one of many such, in a large, convenient loft in this transition part of Farringdon-Street—quiet and orderly, full, lighted with gas, well whitewashed, numerous attended, and thoroughly established.

I went the other night to make another visit. I found the school in the same place, still advancing. It was now an Industrial School too; and besides the men and boys who were learning—some, aptly enough; some, with painful difficulty; some, sluggishly and wearily; some, not at all—to read, and write, and cipher, there were two groups, one of



shoemakers, and one (in a gallery) of tailors, working with great industry and satisfaction. Each was taught and superintended by a regular workman engaged for the purpose, who delivered out the necessary means and implements. All were employed in mending, either their own dilapidated clothes or shoes, or the dilapidated clothes or shoes of some of the other pupils. They were of all ages, from young boys to old men. They were quiet, and intent upon their work. Some of them were almost as unused to it as I should have shown myself to be if I had tried my hand, but all were deeply interested and profoundly anxious to do it somehow or other. They presented a very remarkable instance of the general desire there is, after all, even in the vagabond breast, to know something

useful. One shock-headed man, when he had mended his own scrap of a coat, drew it on with such an air of satisfaction, and put himself to so much inconvenience to look at the elbow he had darned, that I thought a new coat (and the mind could not imagine a period when that coat of his was new!) would not have pleased him better. In

the other part of the school, where each class was partitioned off by screens adjusted like the boxes in a coffee room, was some very good writing, and some singing of the multiplication table—the latter, on a principle much too juvenile and innocent for some of the singers. There was also a ciphering class, where a young pupil-teacher out of the streets, who refreshed himself by spitting every half-minute, had written a legible sum in compound addition on a broken slate, and was walking backward and forward before it, as he worked it, for the instruction of his class.

I had scarcely made the round of the Dormitory, and looked at all these things, when a moving of feet overhead announced that the School was breaking up for the night. It was succeeded by a profound silence, and then by a hymn, sung in a subdued tone, and in very good time and tune, by the learners we had lately seen. Separated from their miserable bodies, the effect of their voices, united in this strain, was infinitely solemn. It was as if their souls were singing—as if the outward differences that parted us had fallen away, and the time was come when all the perverted good that was in them, or that ever might have been in them, arose imploringly to Heaven. ■

From "A Sleep to Startle Us," which appeared in the May 1852 issue of Harper's Magazine. The complete essay—along with the magazine's entire 165-year archive—is available online at harpers.org/fromthearchive.



GANGS OF KARACHI

Meet the mobsters who run the show
in one of the world's deadliest cities

By Matthieu Aikins

This spring, the Rangers, Pakistan's paramilitary security force, launched a series of raids into Karachi's slums for what was described by the government as a crime-prevention campaign. Members of the force blocked off the streets surrounding the city's poorest neighborhoods and exchanged fire with the locals. Over several days, the Rangers seized several caches of weapons and captured or killed dozens of alleged gang members.

As the raids continued, news reports emerged that Uzair Baloch, the former leader of one of the gangs targeted by the military, had accused a number of high-ranking politicians of extortion and conspiracy to commit murder. Karachi is Pakistan's largest city, with an estimated population of 20 million, and stories of corruption and violence are commonplace there. But Uzair, who is a member of Pakistan's Baloch ethnic group, was more powerful than your average gang leader, and his accusations were unusually damning.

Uzair had fled the country in 2013. In December, he was arrested in Dubai, and he was held by the authorities in the Emirates while the Pakistani government sought his extradition. Now, according to a report that aired on March 19 on Express News, he had admitted to carrying out assassinations at the behest of powerful figures within the Pakistan Peoples Party, including the country's former president, Asif Ali Zardari.

The P.P.P. responded that Uzair was a member of a conspiracy against it. On March 18, Saulat Mirza, an assassin who had been on death row for almost seventeen years, had given a sensational televised confession hours before he was due at the

gallows. In his speech, Mirza blamed the leadership of the Muttahida Quami Movement, or M.Q.M., Karachi's most powerful political party, for his crimes. (The execution was delayed, but Mirza was hanged a few weeks later.) There was speculation that Uzair's confession—which, unlike Mirza's, had only been reported secondhand—was part of a plot by the military to weaken the P.P.P. and the M.Q.M., Karachi's two main civilian parties.

That didn't necessarily mean that Uzair's claims were untrue, of course. I have been following his career for several years, and the arrest in Dubai was a dramatic reversal of fortune for a man who, during the 2013 general election, had been a key ally of the P.P.P. He had hosted many party leaders, including the chief minister of Sindh province, at his lavish mansion in the slum of Lyari, on the west side of Karachi.

Uzair had been trying to transform himself from a gangster into a legitimate politician. His downfall showed just how provisional legitimacy can be in Karachi, and how deeply embedded gangs are in the city's politics. His alleged confession suggested he didn't want to be brought down alone.

On May 11, 2013, the day of the general election, I paid a visit to Uzair in Lyari. Like most Westerners in Karachi, I was staying in Defence, the wealthiest and most secure part of the city, which got its name because its housing developments are operated by a military-owned authority. It occupies a peninsula on the southeastern end of the city, which can be sealed off from the rest

Matthieu Aikins is the Schell Fellow at The Nation Institute and the recipient of a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. His article "Kabubble" appeared in the February 2013 issue of Harper's Magazine.



of Karachi in times of civil unrest or, on New Year's Eve, to prevent the city's poor from mingling with the crowd that watches the fireworks on Clifton Beach.

My taxi drove past high walls that hid manicured gardens and multistory, air-conditioned homes. We were heading north—downtown—toward the bank towers and high-rise offices that lined I. I. Chundrigar Road. To the west, I could see the cranes that served the container ships; Karachi's ports account for 95 percent of Pakistan's international trade by volume. The car slowed and we turned onto a narrow, curving road surrounded by stone buildings and shops with their rusted, graffiti-fied shutters pulled down.

For the past two months, election posters had made Karachi's convoluted political geography legible even to an outsider. I had learned to recognize the major players: the arrow symbol and the green, black, and red banners for the incumbent P.P.P., and the image of a kite in red, white, and green for the M.Q.M.

Much of central Karachi is M.Q.M. territory. The posters there showed the broad face and bristly mustache of the party's leader, Altaf Hussain. But as we came down Napier Road and entered Lea Market—normally overflowing with people, now practically deserted because of security fears—the kites petered out. We passed a small island of Awami National Party flags in leftist red that marked a

cluster of Pashtun shops, and then the green, black, and red banners of the P.P.P. began.

Lyari's entrance was marked by a double arch with WELCOME LYARI TOWN painted on it in English and Urdu. Atop the left pillar was a photo of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister, who was assassinated in 2007; atop the right was her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of the P.P.P., who was hanged by a military dictatorship in 1979. The Bhuttos are revered in Lyari. Their photos—Benazir's especially—could be seen on most of the political posters found there. So, however, could the image of a third figure, who was neither a candidate for the election nor a Bhutto: Uzair Baloch. A fair-skinned man with a symmetrical, pleasant face, he was in his late thirties, with a trim black beard and mustache. His eyes crinkled warmly when he smiled—as he did in most portraits—and his slightly elfin ears stuck out a little on each side.

On one set of posters, Uzair appeared with several of his fallen lieutenants. Here was Rashid Bengali, slain by a fellow gangster in an interne-cine dispute. There, in wraparound sunglasses, was young Fahim Badshah Khan, killed by the Rangers. Khan, like many of the martyrs, as they are called, had been photoshopped onto a Swiss-looking meadow along with a luxury SUV. In Lyari, all gangsters go to heaven.

The deeper we went into the slum, the busier the streets became. It was safer there, in territory



that belonged indisputably to Uzair. People were out walking around, some of them heading toward polling stations. Others were watching us, a car with strangers, very carefully. We turned into a side alley and drove up to a group of young men sitting on plastic lawn furniture. They wore loud dress shirts, knockoff designer jeans, and ball caps. Many of them had pistols concealed in their waistbands, and nearby, I was certain, there would be men with assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and belt-fed machine guns—ready to wage war at a moment's notice. There were pickets like this all over Lyari, but the men I saw were especially attentive, because they were guarding the alley that led to Uzair's house. They peered into the taxi and, recognizing my face, nodded for us to pass.

In 2013, Karachi recorded nearly 3,000 murders, more than any other city in the world. It hadn't always been that way—in 2003, the official number of homicides was seventy-six. The stunning rise in violence came in the past decade, when the P.P.P. challenged the M.Q.M. for control of the city.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Karachi was a small, Hindu-dominated city, but after the partition of India, in 1947, hundreds of thousands of Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees arrived. Despite forming a majority, these migrants, known

as *mohajirs*, were never effectively integrated into Karachi's patronage network. The M.Q.M. was founded in 1978 with the aim of uniting them with the rest of the city's Urdu speakers.

By the turn of the millennium, the M.Q.M. was the city's dominant political force. With the support of President Pervez Musharraf, a military dictator who was himself of *mohajir* origin, the party took over the municipal government, which led to the relative peace of 2003. But Karachi is one of the world's fastest-growing megacities, and its demographics keep changing.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of migrants come to Karachi from the villages of Sindh and from Pakistan's mountainous tribal areas. The newly arrived Balochis, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns have gravitated to the M.Q.M.'s rivals, most notably the P.P.P. but also to a host of smaller ethnic and religious parties. These parties, in turn, have followed the M.Q.M.'s lead and seized whole neighborhoods with armed militias.

Everyone participates in Karachi's lucrative *bhatta* economy, the system of extortion, racketeering, protection payments, and "voluntary" donations that has become inseparable from the city's political life. (*Bhatta* is Urdu for "portion.") It is this connection between politics and the criminal economy that distinguishes Karachi's gangs from their no less violent but far more clandestine counterparts in places like Latin America. In

Karachi, sometimes only the thinnest of polite fictions separates the politicians from the men who kill and extort on their behalf.

In Lyari, the P.P.P. has long worked with the neighborhood gangs to defeat political rivals and to help corral voters on election day. But in 2003, the neighborhood was divided by a brutal turf war between two rival groups, one led by Arshad Pappu, and the other by a man known as Rehman Dakaith—Rehman the Bandit.

Uzair joined Rehman's crew shortly after the war with Pappu began. Uzair had been born into a life of relative privilege and was known as a polite, subdued boy. "We used to tease him for being so quiet," one of his elementary-school classmates told me. Uzair's father, Faizu, was a wealthy transporter and local notable. Faizu was distantly related to Rehman, and he collected *bhatta* payments from the other transporters on his behalf.

Then, late one night, Pappu and his men kidnapped Faizu off the street. A few hours later, his bullet-riddled body was found stuffed in a gunnysack. Uzair vowed revenge, and quickly rose to become Rehman's right-hand man. Rehman had plenty of brave street commanders, but he needed someone like Uzair, with his education and wealthy background, to help him enter politics.

In 2007, Musharraf bowed to mounting pressure and agreed to hold the country's first free elections in a decade. Benazir Bhutto returned from exile to lead the P.P.P.'s campaign. In Lyari, however, the incumbent member of parliament from the P.P.P. was facing an insurrection from local organizers, who were fed up with his corruption and absenteeism. Desperate to ward off a challenge from a local,

independent candidate, the party approached Rehman and asked for help fixing the elections. In return they promised a share of the spoils of office. Rehman agreed—though his task was made easier when Bhutto was assassinated while campaigning and a wave of sympathy swept the P.P.P. into power.

After the election, Rehman looked for a way to settle the gang war. Pappu was in prison (some said he had gotten himself arrested in order to avoid being killed), and only his toughest commander was still fighting in Lyari. On a hot summer day in 2008, Rehman sent Uzair to a hotel in Lyari, where the two sides swore an oath of truce. A group called the People's Amn Committee was formed to uphold the agreement, with Rehman as its leader. (*Amn* means "peace" in Urdu.)

At first, the P.P.P. saw the Amn Committee as a way to roll back the M.Q.M. "They couldn't take on the M.Q.M.'s militant wing openly," a senior police official in Karachi told me. "Besides, they were fearful of creating a situation where there was enough chaos that the military had a pretext to intervene. So they created their own militant wing, but it became a Frankenstein and turned on them."

In August 2009, Rehman was assassinated by the police—likely because his political ambitions were threatening the P.P.P. leadership. The next day, Uzair was appointed as the new leader of the Amn Committee. But if the P.P.P. thought they were getting a more pliant figure in Uzair, they had badly miscalculated. The party watched in dismay as he began to build an independent political base.

In the summer of 2011, Uzair met with Owais Muzaffar Tappi, a P.P.P. official and the brother of President Zardari, at the Bhutto family house. The two men clashed over Uzair's refusal to accept political direction from the party. "I was offered twenty-five crores of contracts," Uzair later told the press, "but I told Tappi that I didn't need money and instead wanted Lyari's problems to be solved. He called me obstinate and then I left." (Twenty-five crore rupees is approximately \$2.5 million; Tappi denies offering Uzair any money.)

Shortly afterward, the P.P.P. denounced the Amn Committee. The provincial government





charged Uzair and the rest of the Amn leadership in several murder cases, and the police mounted a full-scale invasion of Lyari. But Uzair was ready. The Amn Committee fought back with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, and the outgunned cops soon bogged down in Lyari's reticular streets. To the Pakistani media, it was a live-action gangster flick straight out of Bollywood, and the TV channels covered it around the clock. "It was like a war," recalled Sohail Khattak, a local journalist who covered both sides of the battle. "The Amn guys had taken up fighting positions in all the front-line buildings and were coordinating with each other over their radios."

Uzair's men brought food and water to Lyari's besieged residents. The Rangers, who had the arms and training to take the neighborhood by force, were absent, a sign that the military did not approve of the operation. After a week of fighting, the government called off the siege. Thirty-eight people, many of them civilians, had been killed. Lyarians blamed the P.P.P. for their suffering; Uzair was hailed as a hero.

By the beginning of 2013, with the national and provincial elections approaching, the P.P.P. faced the possibility that Uzair could take Lyari's seats to a rival party. It chose a humiliating reversal instead. "Our demands were, first, that the cases against the leadership be withdrawn," Zafar Baloch, one of Uzair's lieutenants, told me. "Second, that the government agree to compensate the victims of the operation. Third, we demanded that candi-

dates for the election should be locals from Lyari. And they accepted."

There was one bit of unfinished business. On March 16, Arshad Pappu, who had been released from prison ahead of the police operation, was lured to a party in Defence by three cops. It was a setup. Pappu was handed over to the Amn Committee. They tortured him to death and then, late that night, brought his body to Lyari. It was a Saturday and the locals were sitting out on their stoops, drinking cheap Murree beer and smoking hash. The Amn Committee fighters came swaggering down the street, waving guns and ordering everyone to go to the square. "See the punishment that Arshad Pappu has been given," they said.

A local who was present that night told me that one of the cops, who was later charged in the murder, was at the square pleading with the gangsters: "For God's sake, he's already dead, just give us the body!" But the gangsters were having fun, egging one another on, shouting, "Cut his head, cut his hands!" They chopped off Pappu's head and started kicking it around like a soccer ball. In a video that was later posted online, men can be seen plunging their blood-slicked hands into a slit hacked in Pappu's chest, trying to yank out his slippery, stringy organs. That was the end of the vendetta with Pappu. His cronies fled Lyari, and

Uzair and the Amn Committee were left unopposed.

On election day, Uzair was stationed at a school that the P.P.P. had been using as a

campaign office. His house was next door. When I arrived, I was frisked by a man carrying a submachine gun and shown into the courtyard, which was set up with posters and plastic chairs and tables. There were only a few people there—most of the campaign workers were out canvassing and monitoring polls.

Uzair was sitting alone, hunched forward sullenly, with a pistol and several phones on the table in front of him. Short and thickset, he was wearing a robe and an embroidered Balochi cap. His men were standing behind him at a distance, their faces mirroring his anxiety. Uzair smiled weakly

“HE’S RUTHLESS AND SMART, THE
PERFECT COMBINATION FOR A MOB
BOSS,” SAID A COP WHO ONCE
OVERSAW THE POLICE IN LYARI

as I entered, waved his hand in acknowledgment, and turned back to one of his flunkies. “Where are the Lassis?” he asked, referring to one of Lyari’s many ethnic groups. “Don’t we have Lassis? Have they voted yet?”

Election day was not going well. The Rangers had blocked off the borders of Lyari with shipping containers. Uzair hoped to win three seats in the National Assembly and three seats in the Sindh Provincial Assembly, and several key constituencies were split across those border areas. The M.Q.M. was far better at staffing contested polling booths, and several Amn men had been run out of their stations. The well-oiled M.Q.M. machine was teaching the upstarts a lesson. It was a critical day for Uzair—the moment he hoped to turn more of his street power into political capital—and he was worried that it was slipping from his hands.

After a few minutes, Uzair decided to tour the polling stations. He jumped to his feet and tucked his pistol into his waistband. His bodyguards sprang into action, looking relieved to be on the move again. Several rushed outside to ready the convoy while the others tightened into a protective circle around him. He walked out into the street, where a caravan of 125cc Honda motorcycles had been assembled. For a moment he contemplated the rutted dirt road, the crowd of gawkers, the hard-faced men with guns and radios, and the posters of smiling candidates, his candidates. The M.Q.M., Pappu’s cronies, even the P.P.P.—they all wanted him dead. His survival depended on whether he could bind his fate to Lyari’s and emerge on the other side, transformed. He chuckled bitterly. “I don’t even know where to go,” he said.

The day after the election, I visited Zafar Baloch at his home. Zafar didn’t usually pick

up his phone until at least two in the afternoon, and the Amn men had worked through the night. It was nearly four by the time I found him sitting at the foot of his daybed drinking milky tea and watching cricket highlights on television. “Are you happy with the results?” I asked.

Zafar rubbed his face wearily. He was tall and bulky, his lips and brow heavy, but his eyes were always animated, and he was quick to laugh, exposing betel-stained teeth. “We have won a decent victory,” he said. “Now we’ll see if things continue like before.” The P.P.P. candidates chosen by the Amn Committee had won a seat in the National Assembly and two in the Provincial Assembly. Fewer than they had hoped for, but still a remarkable victory for a group that had been hunted like criminals a year earlier.

Working behind the scenes, Zafar had played a key role in the campaign. He had gotten his start as a P.P.P. activist and had once served as a municipal councillor. Now he was Uzair’s man, in a role in which his contacts with the party were exquisitely useful. “As a political worker, I understood very well that politics in Pakistan are like a war,” he said. He was a front man and political boss for the Amn Committee; he was often called upon to deliver press conferences denouncing the M.Q.M.

“When we joined Rehman, I told him, you can’t do crime your whole life, you have to do social and political works as well, then you’ll have a shelter,” Zafar said. But, at bottom, he said, Rehman had been a street thug, whereas Uzair, with his education and poise, had the potential to take the Amn Committee much further.

Zafar’s bulk on the daybed was enhanced by a cylindrical metal frame that encased his swollen right leg. His tibia and fibula had been shattered by bullets during an assassination attempt the year before and were held in place by metal rods. The flesh around the rods was infected and Zafar often seemed half-stunned from a cocktail of antibiotics and painkillers; nevertheless, he insisted on riding around Lyari’s crowded streets on the back of a motorcycle, his busted leg sticking out into traffic.

Uzair and Zafar were members of what the Amn Committee called the A Team, which controlled political decisions and citywide patronage. The muscle was the B Team: a loose and shifting confederation of charismatic gangsters who had pledged allegiance to the Amn Committee. They employed gangs of men and boys in *bhatta* collection, kidnapping, and various forms of vice—running brothels and casinos, loan-sharking, and drug trafficking. In both Pakistan and India, a gangster is known as a *dada* or *bhai* (“grandfather” or “brother”); the

plural of *bhai* is *bhai log*), which hints at the intimate, often familial ties that bind them to one another and to their neighborhoods. As Michael Corleone puts it in *The Godfather*: “It’s all personal, every bit of business.”

The most feared member of the B Team was Baba Ladla, a short, stocky Lyarian who looked younger than his forty-odd years. He had grown up in a poor family in Lyari’s Bihar Colony, and his real name was Noor Mohamed. His nickname, Baba Ladla, “Little Kind One,” was ironic. In fact, he was known for his extreme violence. He was said to be responsible for the Shershah Scrap Market Massacre: in the fall of 2010, after merchants had balked at making *bhatta* payments, thugs

the commanders needed Uzair and Zafar’s political machine to protect them.

“Now we are taking revenge,” Zafar said as we drove around the neighborhood. “Millions of rupees are collected in *bhatta* from the old city, and the M.Q.M. is afraid that we’re going to take that from them.”

After the election, the whole of Lyari resonated in triumph. Uzair’s men handed out sweets, and fireworks and drum processions lasted through the night. A few days later, I went to visit Habib Hasan, one of Lyari’s leading social workers and the chairman of the Lyari Resource Centre, a community building funded by the Amn Committee, which functions as a sort of



had attacked the market with assault rifles, killing thirteen people and injuring dozens. “He’s ruthless and smart, the perfect combination for a mob boss,” said Omar Shahid Hamid, a city cop who oversaw the police in Lyari until 2006. “Uzair has no strength on his own without Baba and company.”

The A/B dichotomy posed a dilemma for Uzair in his quest to escape the fate of his murdered predecessor. On the one hand, to make his way into legitimate politics, he would need to rein in Baba and his commanders, and at times even serve them up to the authorities. On the other hand, to maintain his lucrative hold on the underground economy, he needed the B Team to battle the M.Q.M. and the city’s other gangs. Uzair could not disown Baba—just as Baba and

nerve center for social and development work in the area. Broad-shouldered, with dark skin and short salt-and-pepper hair, Hasan had a permanently creased brow. He took me on a tour of Lyari’s schools, hospitals, and NGOs to explain just how much the neighborhood was changing thanks to Uzair. “This was a ghost house,” he said outside one school. “The gangsters used to torture people in there and do drugs. No one else came here. Now it is a high school. We have three batches of students graduating each year. It’s a surprise for all of Lyari.”

Hasan grew up in a low-caste family and started work at a young age as a donkey-cart driver and a factory laborer—the kind of clever, motivated young man for whom the gangs might have provided a path to economic mobility. But his ambition



was to be educated. In those days, adults could take free literacy courses that were taught by local activists and held on the pavement, in the open. “That’s how I learned to read and write,” Hasan said, with a note of defiant pride. “I still had nothing besides my education, but I resolved that that’s what I would dedicate my life to.”

He became an instructor and activist and eventually taught the same free courses he had taken. By 2002, he had enough standing in the community to run in the municipal elections on a P.P.P. ticket, against a young Uzair Baloch—and he won. Afterward, Uzair’s father brought the two men together and told his son to accept Hasan’s victory. Uzair still treated Hasan with deference, but it was comical to think of the two as rivals now. The old order had changed beyond recognition in the past decade.

Hasan left politics with the advent of Rehman and Pappu’s gang war, despairing at what was happening in Lyari. But when Uzair became leader of the Amn Committee, he started calling around to Lyari’s social workers, asking for help starting a community center. “The Amn Committee wasn’t organized at that time, it was just a name, not a party, not an organization,” said Hasan. “I had reservations. I told him, ‘You have armed men, how can we work in the same environment?’”

Uzair, he recalled, was insistent. “He said, ‘Give us a chance. No one will interfere with your work. We will give you all kinds of support, books, an office, protection if anyone threatens you—just make our schools a better place.’”

Uzair was as good as his word, Hasan told me as we drove past the refurbished Lyari General Hospital, behind which a new medical school was being built. During the Musharraf Administration, nothing had been built in the neighborhood, a deliberate policy, Hasan and many Lyarians believed, that was intended to sap the strength of a P.P.P. stronghold. The area’s elected officials stole the few development funds that were apportioned. “None of them ever came to Lyari,” he said. “Even the police stations were involved in crime.”

When the P.P.P. came back to power in 2008, \$28 million in new funding was earmarked for Lyari. Uzair used the Amn Committee’s muscle to ensure that corruption was kept within reasonable bounds. “Uzair’s principle was that the work should get done,” Hasan said. “Okay, there’s corruption, people take their cut, but in the end the projects should be finished. And they were. Uzair forced them to complete them on time, and to maintain their quality.”

Just as important was the end of the gang war within Lyari, and an ensuing ban on street crime that was enforced by the Amn Committee. “Uzair said, ‘Let’s finish the big crimes—robbery, drug peddling,’” Hasan told me. It was true. I felt safer inside Lyari than I did in most other places in Karachi, including the wealthy enclaves, where carjackings and robberies at gunpoint were common. In Lyari, muggers, rapists, cell-phone snatchers, and drug touts knew to ply their trade elsewhere, or get a bullet in the head. I would sometimes stay in Lyari with friends past mid-



night, and we'd walk the streets, which were full of locals browsing vegetable stands and munching on sticky, sweet *jalebis*. Only the borderlands near the M.Q.M.'s territory were abandoned, and tense. "People call them criminals, but they've built hospitals, schools, and social projects," said Akram Baloch, a former journalist who became the head of the Amn Committee's media team. "In these circumstances, you must make compromises."

Like so many robber barons before him, Uzair understood that philanthropy was the path to respectability. Some of his efforts had already borne fruit. When the

police and Rangers raided Lyari in 2012, the residents demonstrated in the streets, decrying the killing and arrest of "innocents." "*Ek Lyari sab se bari, Uzair bhai, Uzair bhai*," they chanted: "One Lyari, stronger than any, brother Uzair, brother Uzair."

Around the corner from the Lyari Resource Centre was the rooftop Youth Café, where a crew of kids was putting up straw screens against the sun and painting the concrete walls with colorful murals. Excited to see a foreign visitor, one of the kids walked up to me. "Sir, let me show you my Michael Jackson dance," he said, before doing a rendition of "Thriller." As the others crowded around, I recognized one of the older boys; he had worked on a security detail during the election, and was in the process of transitioning from a scout and gofer into someone tasked with more serious jobs—I had seen Uzair's men let him handle their pistols. Here, though, he was a kid again, giggling as the runty M.J. let a slow-motion wave ripple from one skinny wrist to the other.

For Hasan, kids like these were the reason he'd made an alliance with Uzair. Lyari could support educated youth whose talent and vigor would balance that of the *bhai log* in the streets, a new generation that would expiate the sins and compromises of their fathers. "There is an education revolution happening right now in Lyari," he said.

"Of course it's not a democratic culture. But it's our only chance."

For a moment, it seemed like the peace would hold in Lyari. The days after the election brought

the hottest part of year, when even the nightly sea breeze turned languid and stifling. In summer, Pakistan's chronic electricity woes become a crisis. The city flickered like a dying bulb as power came in shorter and shorter spurts; when the lights went out and the fans stopped, the little cinder-block apartments seemed to press in on their occupants. Even the drunks on their stoops seemed too heat-stricken to shout.

Then, a week after the ballots were cast, a group of Baba Ladla's men walked north past Hingorabad Road. This was the dividing line between his group's turf and that of the Kutchi Rabta Committee, a rival armed group. The K.R.C. occupied Agra Taj, a small corner of Lyari that was populated mostly by Katchis, one of Karachi's ethnic minorities. As far back as anyone could remember, the Katchis had lived in peace with the Baloch-dominated neighborhoods around them. But in 2009, when a group of Katchi businessmen stood up to the Amn Committee's attempts to extend *bhatta* collection to Agra Taj, open warfare had erupted. The K.R.C. had turned to the M.Q.M. for assistance and now, to the Amn Committee, Agra Taj represented an unacceptable foothold for their mortal enemies in Lyari.

On the evening of May 18, 2013, three men under Ladla's command entered Agra Taj armed with a submachine gun and two Kalashnikovs and started firing into a crowded street. Eight people died in all, including a twelve-year-old girl. Word spread quickly that another spasm of violence was coming, and the neighborhood resounded with a preparatory commotion: the rasp of shutters being pulled down; a mother's frantic cell-phone call; the wail of an ambulance; feet pounding up staircases, bearing the weight of cans of ammunition; the roar of Honda motorbikes. The K.R.C. hit back by opening fire from their rooftops. The two sides battled with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades as the people in the neighborhoods cowered in their homes.

The battle raged for twenty-four hours. I arrived at the tail end of it, weaving through the traffic jam on a motorcycle driven by my Katchi-speaking fixer. A mob of younger boys started throwing stones at us until he shouted at them frantically in their native tongue. We pulled into a side alley; ahead we could hear the rattle of automatic weapons. Agra Taj's streets were even filthier than the rest of Lyari. There was no trash collection, and a tremendous amount of plastic garbage had accumulated in the lanes.

We turned down another alley. The fighting was almost over, and in the sheltered back streets families were coming out to stretch their limbs after a day stuck inside crowded apartments. They pointed to where stray bullets had pocked satellite dishes and windowsills and conferred about where to find milk and other essentials.

We parked the bike. A little farther down the alley, half a dozen young K.R.C. fighters were crouched together. Some of them were leaning on long-barreled assault rifles. I could hear the metallic *snick-snick* of bullets being slipped into magazines. Their leader, a heavyset kid with a bowl cut, introduced himself as Haider.

He told me that they had been up all night exchanging fire with the Amn Committee. They looked shell-shocked from their first real taste of combat. When I made a clumsy joke about treating them to lunch, only Haider laughed, a soft, mirthless chuckle as his gaze slid up and down the alleyway.

I asked whom they were fighting on the other side. "It's Jasim Golden and Fahim Baloch, both

man exclaimed. Another came up and handed me a heavy silver cylinder as long as my palm; it was a VOG-25P bounding fragmentation grenade, fired from behind Amn lines. It had, thus far, failed to explode.

As the fight with Baba Ladla's men continued over the next few days, Agra Taj began to feel like an open-air prison. Residents started stockpiling milk and water, and those who lived closest to the front lines tunneled through their walls in order to create unexposed escape routes. But if the urban warfare in Karachi was astonishing in its intensity, it was also highly localized, limited to the slums and poor neighborhoods of the periphery. Certain evenings, in another universe, at some cocktail party at a mansion in Defence,



are part of Baba Ladla's crew," Haider said. He pulled out a phone to show me pictures of them. He knew an awful lot about the *bhai log*—later I would learn that he had once been a leader of the M.Q.M. cadres in Lyari, and had a long rap sheet.

Once the firing stopped, the Rangers and police showed up. The locals jeered. "Where were you when we were getting slaughtered?" shouted one old man as he shook his bony fist at an armored personnel carrier. The mob became rowdier, and the Rangers fired some tear-gas canisters and then live ammunition over our heads. We ran back with the crowd into the side streets. When some of the people there realized that I was a foreigner, they formed a curious knot around me and shouted their complaints. "Lyari is like Afghanistan!" one

I'd be interrupted by a call summoning me to the latest outbreak of violence, and, slightly tipsy, I would have my driver rush me across town and deposit me at the border of Agra Taj, where my fixer would be waiting with his motorcycle.

On one night, in an alley where the K.R.C. fighters had cut the power, we skirted a large puddle by the glow of our cell phones. We advanced gingerly until, from a group of obscure figures, a man's voice hissed, "Put out the light!" The man then beckoned me to a fighting position barricaded with sandbags. He pointed down the deserted alley toward a set of pale, faint shapes—the enemy was only thirty yards away. "There's twenty or twenty-five of them down there," he said.

The houses nearby had been evacuated of women and children, and the men and boys

had all come down into the alley to form a communal defense in case of a raid by the Amn side. The youngest was fifteen, and the oldest was around seventy, the teen's grandfather, a man with stooped shoulders, a bushy white beard, and a scarf tied up under his chin and over the top of his head. He said he had lived in Agra Taj his whole life. It had always been a peaceful area, but now here they were at the barricades, like guerrillas.

I asked whether they had any experience or training with the weapons they were using. "This is our training," he said.

When the P.P.P. came to power seven years ago, businessmen in Karachi no longer knew whom to pay off. "The recent deregulation of the market of protection, following the gradual loss of control of the M.Q.M. over revenue collection," writes political scientist Laurent Gayer, in *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City*, distressed the city's mercantile and industrial classes. The change "paved the way for increasingly violent and arbitrary forms of extortion."

The owner of a large factory in the eastern part of the city told me a typical story. For years, he had been giving small sums to the various political parties in his neighborhood, perhaps a few hundred dollars a month, to keep them happy. As a supporter of the M.Q.M., he voluntarily contributed larger payments to that party. But early in 2013, he received a phone call from someone claiming to be allied with the Amn Committee. The man demanded a lump sum of \$25,000. "We said, 'Who are you, can you prove it?'" the factory owner recalled, as we sipped tea in his palatial home in Defence. "He said, 'I'll prove it in thirty minutes.'" Around half an hour later, men on motorcycles fired a burst of bullets into the storage area at the back of the factory.

The negotiations continued over the next three weeks as the owner pleaded for a lower *bhatta* payment. In the meantime, he worked his contacts in the police and the military. "But everyone we talked to said that if it's the Amn Committee, then there's nothing they can do, they're connected with the government," he said. Eventually, they settled on monthly installments of \$4,000. The owner said that after the first payment the man divided the money into four stacks and said, 'This is for the Rangers, this is for the chief minister, and this is for the police. And this is our share.' Now he sends his guy every month, saying 'My man is wearing this color cap.' They're absolutely unafraid of doing this openly."

Uzair, meanwhile, continued to consolidate political power. Immediately after the swearing-in ceremony for new members at the Provincial As-

sembly, while the fighting in Agra Taj continued, a delegation of high-ranking P.P.P. leaders traveled to his house in Lyari for a lavish banquet.

When I visited Uzair a few days later, he sardonically recounted all the P.P.P. dignitaries who had been there, the same notables who had called for him to be arrested the year before. Political necessity had brought them together, but their alliance would last only as long as Uzair had something to offer. The fate of his predecessor weighed heavily on him. "They tried to use me like they used Rehman," he said.

I asked him if he ever imagined what his life would have been like had his father not been killed by Pappu. "It overturned my life completely," he said, and sighed. "Before that, I was just a normal kid, but then I had to manage his business, manage the welfare of the community, meet with all the people—I had to become a man of the people."

He paused a moment, then fixed me with a pleading gaze. "I am not a don," he said in English, and chuckled gently. I noticed that there was a biography of Nelson Mandela under the table. Some guests arrived—representatives of communities around the city seeking Uzair's favor—and I excused myself. He offered me these parting words: "Whoever supports and cares for the poor people, I am with them."

Uzair refused to allow me to interview any of the Amn Committee's B Team commanders. In some ways he was as much their prisoner as their leader, a figurehead who could not escape their demands. "People think that Uzair is the big boss and leader of Lyari, but the criminal elements are the real behind-the-scenes power," the senior police official told me. "He can only influence them so far, especially Baba Ladla, who is a power of equivalent standing."

The last time I saw Uzair, he was in full politician mode, entertaining a wealthy society lady from Defence who was interested in philanthropic work in Lyari. She seemed enthralled by him; he in turn was taking great pleasure in showing her around his many projects. We traveled in a convoy and stopped at a blood bank that he was funding. The locals gawked as Uzair stepped out, surrounded by machine gun-toting bodyguards and trailed by the lady in her colorful robes.

The blood bank was a well-made one-story clinic, though the drywall inside was still being hung. We stepped into the courtyard, which had been decorated in a style common to warlords' mansions and wedding halls in Pakistan and Afghanistan—what might be called Rococo grotto. There were mirrored columns, fake gilding, and elaborate chandeliers, along with rustic touches such as plaster trees, plastic flowers, and animal statuary. One wall

bulged with tree trunks that had stubby, shorn limbs. A concrete parasol in the shape of a giant mushroom sprouted from the ground, and in the center was a stepped fountain with a dangling, tonguelike waterspout. The wall had been partially painted in orange and green; the rest of the décor, with its pale, raw texture, looked like cake icing.

"Did you design this yourself?" I asked Uzair.

"I will show you the designer," he said, grinning. "Baba! Come here, Baba!"

One of the men in the garden came toward us hesitantly. He was dressed in a salmon-colored shalwar kameez, with a checked scarf tied like a bandanna over his forehead. He was short but muscular, with high cheekbones and a square, handsome jaw. He looked around bashfully as he shook our hands. I realized that he was Baba Ladla.

"Baba Ladla designed this garden?" I said in astonishment. Ladla beat a hasty retreat.

"He is *wanted*, Ladla," Uzair said with a snicker to the society lady, using the English word.

Seeing my expression, one of Uzair's advisers remarked, "Inside of every *bhai*, there is an artist."

Six months after that meeting, in March 2014, I attended a rally in front of the Karachi Press Club, which serves as a focal point for demonstrations in the city. Several hundred residents of Lyari had gathered to protest the violence in their neighborhood; they were arrayed in rows, with the women at the front. "No more gang war!" they shouted to the television cameras, as a group of bored-looking police officers watched.

Riven by mistrust, Uzair and Baba turned on each other, and both had fled the country. The Amn Committee had split into two rival groups of *bhai log* who were killing each other mercilessly, egged on by the city's political powers. The inciting incident had been the assassination of Zafar Baloch, who was shot near his house by motorcycle-riding gunmen. The gangsters' intimate knowledge of one another's hideouts and methods made their attacks all the more effective; each day brought tit-for-tat assassinations and kidnappings, and every week a battle involving machine guns and rockets would erupt in Lyari's streets, causing scores of civilian casualties.

"If the people don't stand up for themselves, there won't be peace for anyone," said Mahagul Baloch, an eighteen-year-old member of the Baloch Human Rights Organization, the local activist group that had organized the rally. "As for Uzair, he's not a leader, he's a gangster."

The anger against the gangs was palpable, but there was something perfunctory to the demonstration as well. It was always the same routine in Karachi: get together at the Arts Council, walk a

few hundred yards to the press club while the police held back traffic, chant slogans for an hour until the news cameras got their fill. It was hardly enough to make your presence felt above the din of the city; for the rest of Karachi, it was just another spat among thugs in Lyari.

Arbab Ali, a cameraman from Samaa TV, stood watching the protesters, a pack of Gold Leaf cigarettes in his hand. I asked him how many rallies like this he usually saw. He shrugged. "Sometimes we have twelve in one day," he said. "Let's see, there was the rickshaw-drivers' union here before today, and some teachers. There will probably be two or three more."

Lyari was no longer the open space it had been during Uzair's reign. Entering the slum now meant navigating carefully around the latest trouble spots. The Lyari Resource Centre, which was near the front line between Baba and Uzair, had been closed. I found Habib Hasan at home in a glum mood. "When war begins, your fate passes out of your hands," he told me.

Zafar's death had taken him by surprise. He shook his head. "This was an announcement. Zafar was running the system in Uzair's absence; they announced that the system was finished."

The political power of the Amn Committee had been broken; Lyari's pot was kept boiling again. Everything that Hasan had been working for, all the dividends of peace, had been put on ice. "All those projects I showed you? They're stopped. Nothing can happen when there's no security," Hasan told me. I asked him if he had made a mistake allying himself with Uzair, and his face darkened.

"You think I'm on the same team as them?" he said, and then sighed. "I took a risk for my people, for my community. Maybe it was a mistake."

What would happen next? In May 2014, Baba was reportedly killed by Iranian guards while trying to cross the border—though I was told his family has yet to receive his body, and there were rumors in Lyari that he was still alive. This April, Uzair was released by the Emirati authorities, shortly after he leveled his accusations against Zardari. The Pakistani government had been curiously inept in its attempts to extradite him; its delegations kept getting turned back at the Dubai airport with improper paperwork. One officer had even mistakenly brought along his service pistol. The threat of Uzair's sensational story had, like the man himself, disappeared, though one Karachi news channel recently reported that he was in the custody of Pakistan's intelligence agencies.

"They will decide if Uzair will come back, or if it is someone else's turn," said one of my friends in Lyari. It was a familiar refrain: events in Lyari were controlled by dark, hidden forces. But was the alternative thought—that Karachi's chaos has grown too unpredictable for anyone to master—any less terrifying? ■

ROMANCING KANO

Photographs from northern Nigeria

By Glenna Gordon

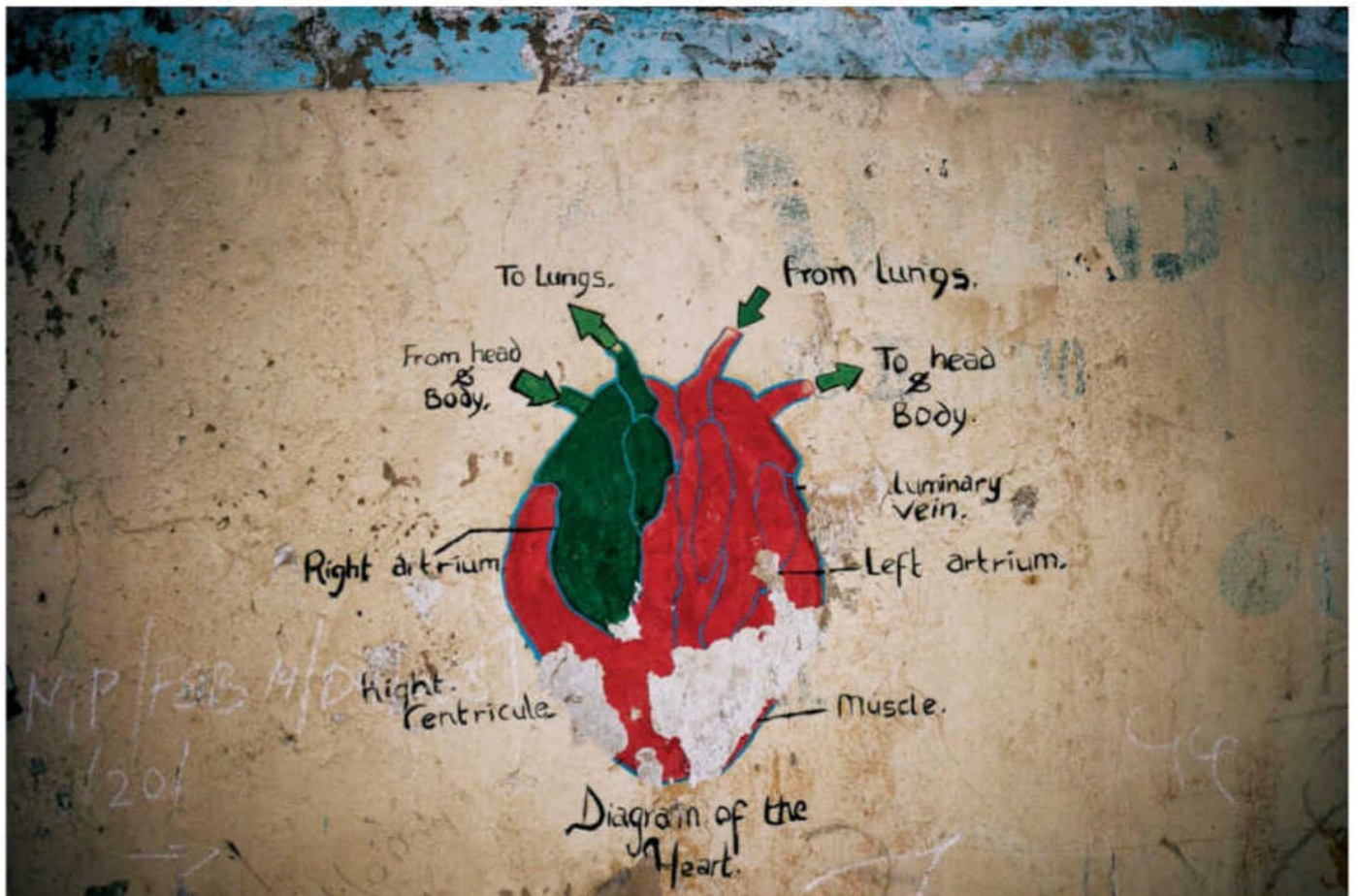


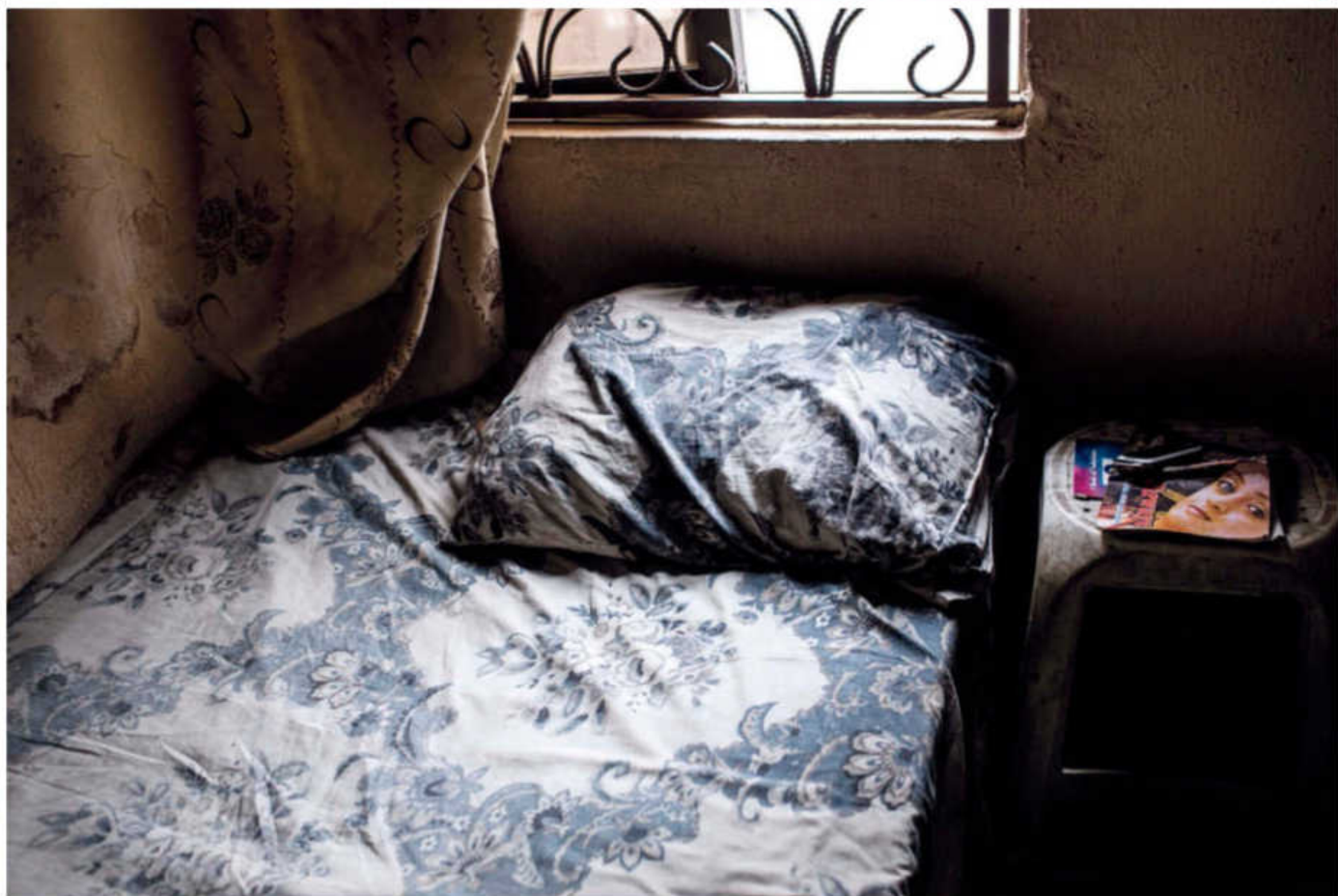
In Kano, a majority-Muslim city in northern Nigeria, a group of devout women writers have built a cottage industry out of romance novels. The books, known in Hausa as *littattafan soyayya*, or “love literature,” are printed in stapled softcover editions and sold in markets across the Sahel, typically for the equivalent of one or two dollars. The novels tend to focus on courtships, weddings, and marriages; many feature poor female protagonists who marry rich suitors.

Kano is Nigeria's second-largest city, and in recent years it has been subject to frequent bombings by Boko Haram, a radical separatist movement that has kidnapped and raped hundreds of women and girls. Before the advent of Boko Haram it was not unusual for women in northern Nigeria to spend most of their time at home, but the group's attacks have restricted the opportunities for work and socialization even further. Though government and religious authorities have accused *littattafan soyayya* of corrupting the youth, the novels have become a medium for Hausa women to discuss some of their most pressing concerns, including H.I.V., purdah, forced marriage, and the education of female children.

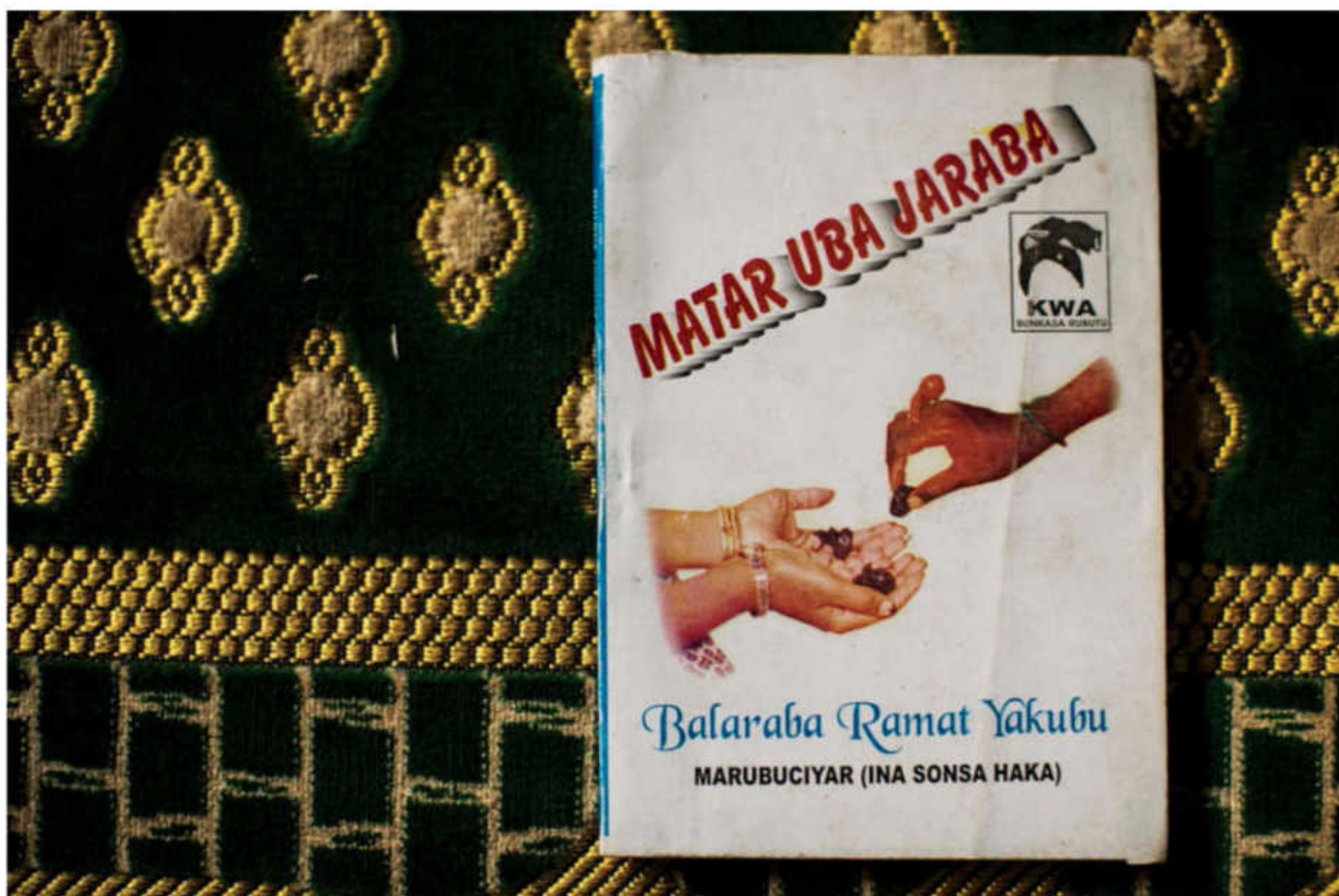
Glenna Gordon is a photographer based in New York City.

Her work will be on view in October as part of the exhibition Moving Walls 23, Open Society Foundations, New York City.



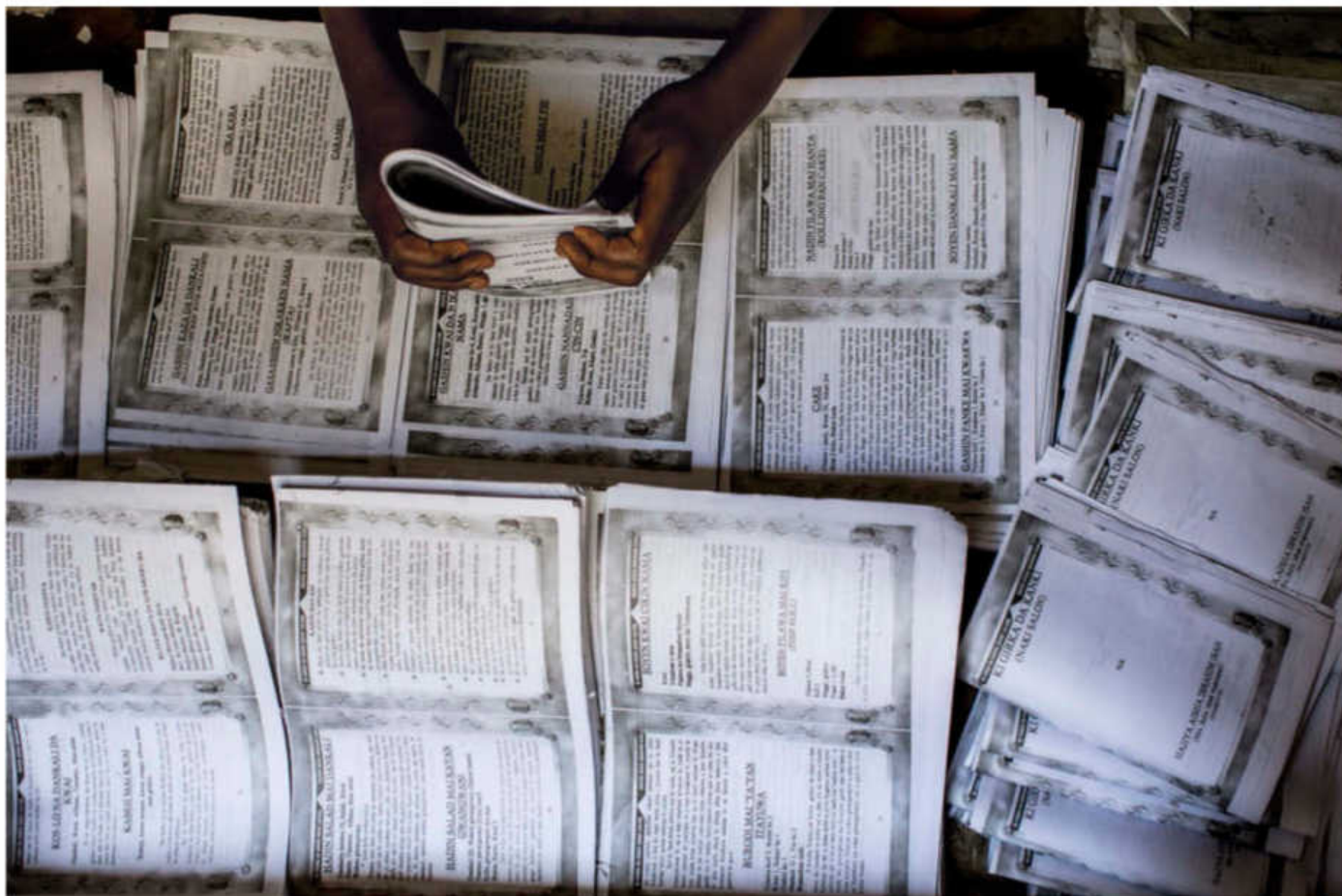
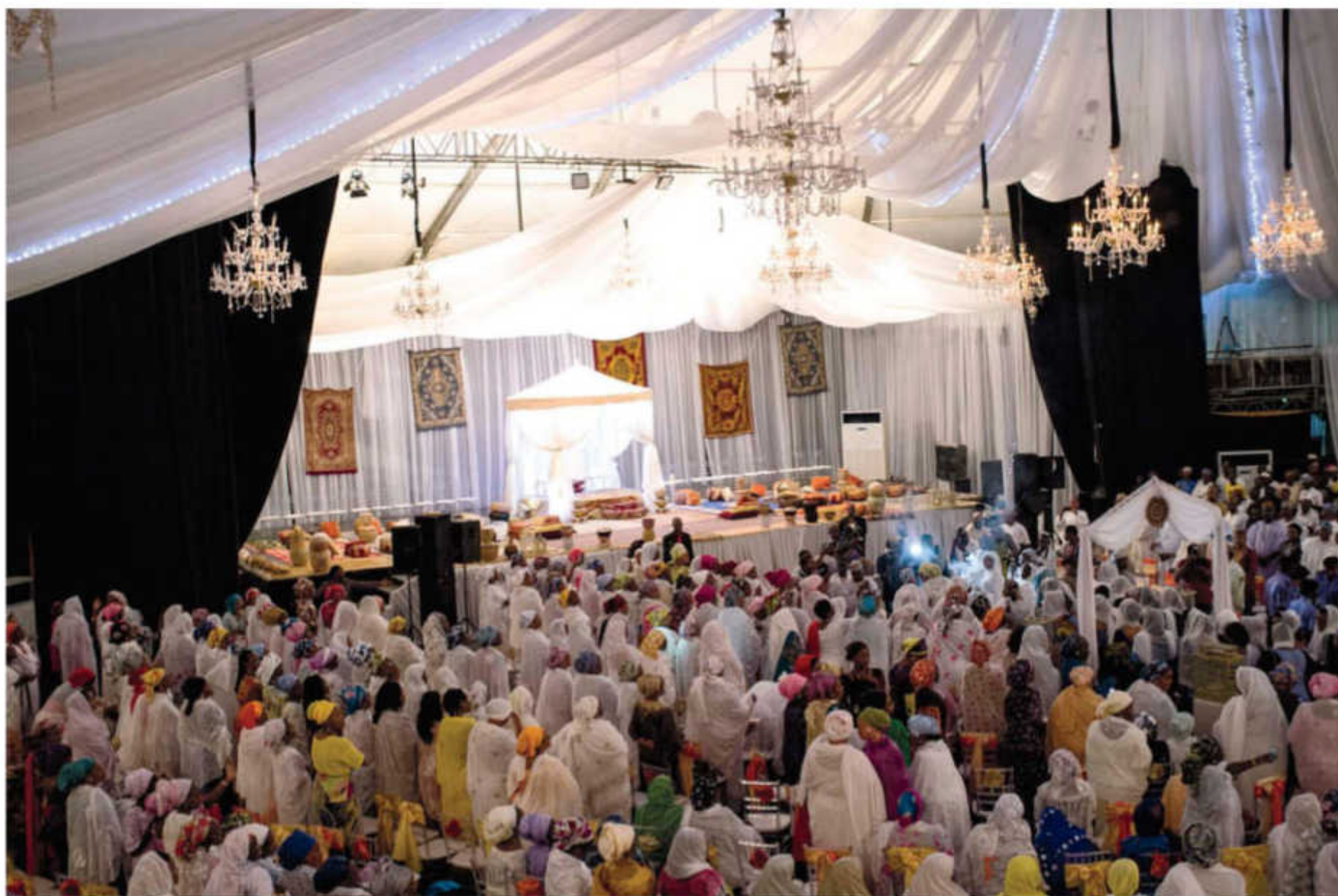


Khadija Gudaji, a writer of *litattafan soyayya*, at her home in Kano
A romance novel on a young woman's nightstand in Kano





The computer of a novelist who lives in Kaduna, a city south of Kano
A young woman reads a romance novel in her bedroom in Kano



Many of Kano's romance novels concern lavish traditional weddings, like the one pictured here—the wedding of the head of the Nigerian police force, in Abuja
Littattafan soyayya are usually mimeographed and assembled by hand



Female officers of the Hisbah, the Islamic morality police, which often censors the romance novels
A wedding *fatiha*, a ceremony in which a marriage contract is read and confirmed, in Dawakin Tofa, a small town outside Kano





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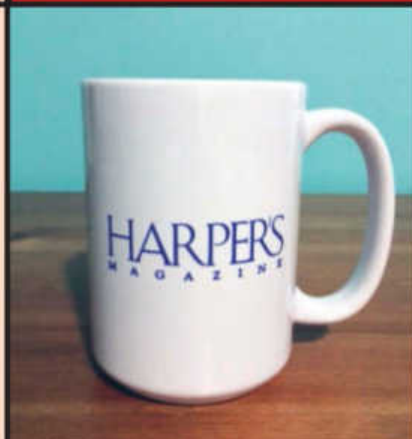
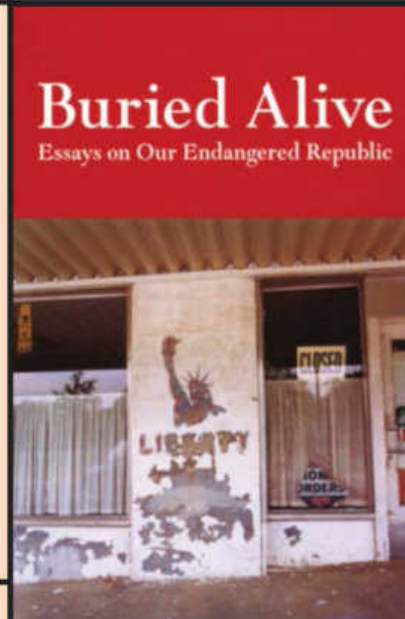
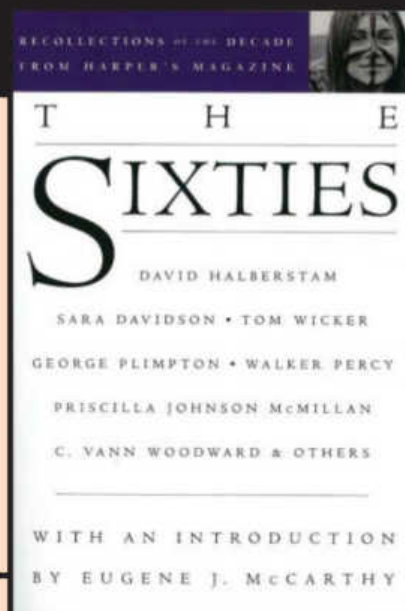
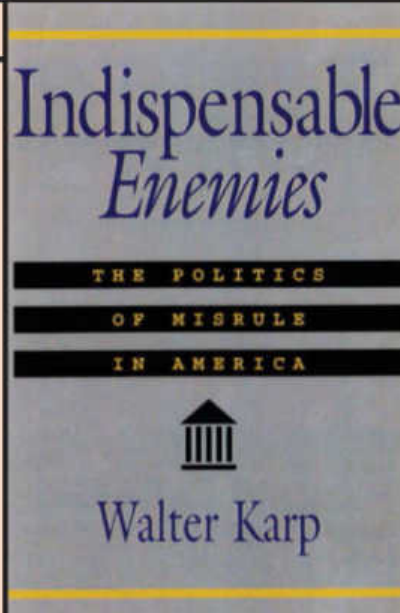
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WEED WHACKERS

Monsanto, glyphosate, and the war on invasive species

By Andrew Cockburn



On a Friday evening in January, a thousand people at the annual California Native Plant Society conference in San Jose settled down to a banquet and a keynote speech deliv-

Andrew Cockburn is the Washington editor of Harper's Magazine and the author, most recently, of Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins.

ered by an environmental historian named Jared Farmer. His chosen topic was the eucalyptus tree and its role in California's ecology and history. The address did not go well. Eucalyptus is not a native plant but a Victorian import from Australia. In the eyes of those gathered at the San Jose DoubleTree, it qualified as "invasive,"

"exotic," "alien"—all dirty words to this crowd, who were therefore convinced that the tree was dangerously combustible, unfriendly to birds, and excessively greedy in competing for water with honest native species.

In his speech, Farmer dutifully highlighted these ugly attributes, but also quoted a few more positive

remarks made by others over the years. This was a reckless move. A reference to the tree as “indigenously Californian” elicited an abusive roar, as did an observation that without the aromatic import, the state would be like a “home without its mother.” Thereafter, the mild-mannered speaker was continually interrupted by boos, groans, and exasperated gasps. Only when he mentioned the long-horn beetle, a species imported (illegally) from Australia during the 1990s with the specific aim of killing the eucalyptus, did he earn a resounding cheer.

California native-plant partisans are a committed lot, and not only in their dislike of eucalyptus trees. Many of them are influential in local government, and they yearn to restore the treeless “native” grassland that greeted the first European settlers of the Bay Area in 1769. (For centuries, Native Americans had cleared the trees to facilitate hunting.) Thus the romantic Monterey cypress is a frequent target for the chain saws of the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department—even though two small stands in Monterey, just fifty miles south, are cherished and protected as natives. The cypress is not the only item on the nativist hit list. Over the next few years, more than 450,000 trees in Oakland, Berkeley, and neighboring areas are due to be destroyed in the name of “wildfire-risk reduction.”

Defining “native” and “invasive” in an ever-shifting natural world poses some problems. The camel, after all, is native to North America, though it went extinct here 8,000 years ago, while the sacrosanct redwood tree is invasive, having snuck in at some point in the past 65 million years. The National Invasive Species Council defines the enemy as “an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environ-

mental harm or harm to human health.” But the late, great evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould dismissed such notions as “romantic drivel.” Natives, he wrote, are simply “those organisms that first happened to gain and keep a footing,” and he ridiculed the suggestion that early arrivals “learn to live in ecological harmony with [their] surroundings, while later interlopers tend to be exploiters.”



Even so, anti-invasive ideology is prevalent across the country, from university biology departments to wildlife bureaucracies to garden clubs. In Virginia, where I spend part of my time, a nice lady from the Virginia Native Plant Society told me that her idea of a truly natural landscape was the one viewed by the Jamestown settlers in 1607. To that end, she sternly urged me to uproot my yellow-blossomed forsythia (of Balkan origin) and replace it with a “good native shrub.” In Texas, George W. Bush used to devote much of his presidential vacation time to destroying the tamarisk trees—reviled Eurasian imports—that grew on his ranch. Many states maintain invasive-plant councils (and sometimes exotic-pest-plant councils) to monitor and eradicate alien invaders. Last year, the North Carolina In-

vasive Plant Council gave its annual Certificate of Excellence to two forest rangers who had detected a small patch of cogongrass—an invasive unwittingly imported from Asia in packing crates, which the Vietnamese call “American weed,” because it spread on land defoliated by Agent Orange.

As it happens, an erstwhile supplier of Agent Orange, the Monsanto Company, also manufactures America’s

most popular remedy for cogongrass: glyphosate. The active ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup and many other weed killers, glyphosate is the weapon of choice for battling all sorts of invaders. A 2014 study by the California Invasive Plant Council found that more than 90 percent of the state’s land managers used the compound, which is particularly recommended as a slayer of eucalyptus trees. Discussing *Phragmites australis*, the reed found in wetlands throughout the country, Massachusetts conservation officials similarly tout this “effective” weed killer. Pennsylvania urges glyphosate’s deployment against

purple loosestrife, while Illinois recommends it for Japanese knotweed. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries prescribes it for cogongrass but warns that “multiple applications for full control” may be required.

This anti-invasive mania is not merely a local phenomenon. It is the official position of the federal government, as expressed by the State Department, that “invasive alien species pose one of the most serious threats to our environment, affecting all regions of the United States and every nation in the world.” In February, National Invasive Species Awareness Week was celebrated in Washington, complete with a reception on Capitol Hill. Last year, the federal government spent more than \$2 billion to

fight the alien invasion, up to half of which was budgeted for glyphosate and other poisons.

That's small change, nativists argue, when measured against the damage such interlopers inflict on the national economy. The Department of the Interior claims that the annual tab is \$120 billion. But this number comes from a 2005 report by David Pimentel, an ecologist and scholar at Cornell, whose dislike of aliens apparently extends to the human variety, as evidenced by his public opposition to both legal and illegal immigration. Pimentel extrapolated at least some of his findings from such dubious assumptions as the dollar value of grain consumed by each rat in the United States. In an earlier paper, he concluded that cats were costing us \$17 billion every year, after calculating that our furry (and, in his view, non-native) friends kill an annual 568 million birds, and arbitrarily valuing each bird at \$30.

On close examination, other examples of the damage said to be caused by exotic invaders look no less questionable. The supposedly supercombustible eucalyptus, for example, survives fires that consume surrounding plant life—and rather than unfairly appropriating water, the tree actually irrigates soil by absorbing moisture from the coastal fogs through its leaves and funneling it out through its roots. (Though still cited as the prime culprit in the devastating 1991 Oakland firestorm, the eucalyptus was in fact cleared of responsibility in a FEMA report.) Monarch butterflies belie its reputation for repelling wildlife, the eucalyptus being their favored wintering abode in California.

As for the tamarisk, it consumes no more water than the beloved cottonwood, native to the Southwest. Nor, contrary to rumor, is it inhospitable to other species, as certified by the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, which delights in roosting amid the tamarisk's foliage. According to Matthew Chew, a historian of biology at Arizona State University, the tree's sorry reputation dates to a ploy during the 1940s by a local mining corporation, whose operations required enormous quantities of river water—which had already been allo-

cated to local farmers and other businesses. The solution was to generate studies demonstrating the heinous quantities consumed by the thirsty tamarisk. The destruction of the trees would theoretically free up huge quantities of "new" water in the rivers, which could then be used by the selfsame mining corporation.

Then there is the zebra mussel. This immigrant from the Caspian Sea is a perennial target of the nativists, thanks to its tendency to reproduce in vast numbers, encrust jetties, clog water-intake pipes, and crowd out God-fearing American mussels. But zebra mussels have successfully

THE DREAM OF ERADICATING THE INTERLOPER IS INTERTWINED WITH A FANTASY OF RESTORING THE "ORIGINAL" LANDSCAPE

filtered pollution in the notoriously filthy Lake Erie and other waterways, thus promoting the revival of aquatic plants. The mussel also feeds a growing population of smallmouth bass and lake sturgeon.

It is the common reed, however, that has inspired one of the most determined and dubious campaigns of extermination. Phragmites is accused of robbing other plants, fish, and wildlife of essential nutrients and living space. Delaware has responded by spraying and respraying on an annual basis a 6,700-acre expanse of the Delaware River estuary with thousands of gallons of glyphosate-based weed killer. In 2013, locals in the Hudson River community of Piermont, New York, discovered a plan to destroy a 200-acre reed marsh fronting the town. Outraged, they fought back. "We love the marsh," an indignant Marthe Schulwolf, who is active in opposing the scheme, told me. "It's beautiful, a living environment, with lots of wildlife, and it protected us from the Hurricane Sandy storm surge." The townspeople were especially alarmed to learn that the state's "toolbox" for eradication included heavy spraying of herbicides—glyphosate being the customary choice—right next to two playgrounds.

As usual, the nativist dream of eradicating the interloper is intertwined with a fantasy of restoring the landscape to its "original" condition. The common reed has also covered vast stretches of the New Jersey Meadowlands, to the irritation of nativists who yearn for the return of the original cordgrass. Peter Del Tredici, formerly a senior research scientist at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, points out that the New Jersey Turnpike bears much of the blame: by blocking tidal flows, inimical to phragmites, it has allowed the reed to flourish. Ripping out the highway would bring back the cordgrass soon enough. "Meanwhile," he adds, "there are over five hundred landfills in this area that are leaking nitrogen and phosphorus, and phragmites is actually cleaning the site up." In any case, he said, the very idea of "re-creating a lost landscape is an impossibility, because the conditions under which these landscapes evolved no longer exist. The world is a totally different place as a result of human activity. There's no going back in time."

Mark Davis, a professor of biology at Macalester College and a frequent critic of anti-invasive hysteria, put it more pungently. "It's the same perspective as ISIS wanting to re-create the seventh-century caliphate," he remarked. "It's ecological fundamentalism, the notion that the purity of the past has been polluted by outsiders." Far from crowding out native species, he argued, invasives tend to move into areas that have been ravaged, or at least disturbed, by human activity. They are, in other words, a symptom, not a cause. Cogongrass is one striking example, but the same pattern recurs with many vilified species. Ailanthus, a salt-friendly seaside tree from China, spread inland from the East Coast along the fringes of America's interstates, tracking the salt religiously spread by highway departments during winter snowstorms.

If the anti-invasive movement rests on such debatable foundations, why has it flourished in this country, winning endorsement from activists, local, state, and federal bureaucracies,

and respected academics? It's not as though hostility to newly arrived plant species has been a great American tradition.¹ In California, the eucalyptus was once universally cherished for its graceful and colorful appearance in a land often devoid of trees—indeed, during the 1870s, it was planted by the hundreds of thousands. A century ago, the tamarisk was promoted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as an ideal means to prevent soil erosion in the Southwest. Even kudzu was once hailed as the “Lord’s indulgent gift to Georgians”: government nurseries grew millions of seedlings and distributed them to farmers as a restorative for depleted soil.

Nowadays, the notion that plants and animals have a “natural” habitat, from which outsiders must be expelled, has taken firm hold in the United States—first among a cadre of biologists, then in the media, and ultimately at the highest levels of the federal government. What happened? David Theodoropoulos, a California naturalist and seed merchant and the author of *Invasion Biology: Critique of a Pseudoscience*, is blunt about what he sees as a deadly inversion of environmental priorities. “Thirty years ago,” he told me, “the greatest threats to nature were chain saws, bulldozers, and poisons. Now the greatest threats are wild plants and animals. And what do we use to fight them? Chain saws, bulldozers, and poisons. Who does this serve?”

Retracing some recent history may help to answer his question. During the Reagan era, when environmentalists were still imbued with the spirit of Earth Day, nobody worried about invasive species. Instead, well-organized, militant groups were busy fighting chemical pollution, nuclear power,

shale-oil drilling, logging devastation, and other corporate onslaughts. According to Jeffrey St. Clair, a historian of environmentalism, “People like [Reagan’s interior secretary] James Watt definitely mobilized the movement, and so the corporations weren’t really able to get all that they wanted.”

By 1992, the movement had a self-appointed standard-bearer in the political arena: Senator Al Gore of Tennessee. That year he published his best-selling *Earth in the Balance*, in which he manfully vowed to bear the political costs of his environmental crusading:

Every time I pause to consider whether I have gone too far out on a limb, I look at the new facts that continue to pour in from around the world and conclude that I have not gone far enough.... The time has long since come to take more political risks—and endure more political criticism—by proposing tougher, more effective solutions and fighting hard for their enactments.

These uplifting sentiments were not always matched by actions. Critics noted Gore’s championship while in Congress of the \$8 billion Clinch River breeder-reactor project, riddled with fraud and bribery. They also pointed out his legislative maneuvers on behalf of the Tellico Dam, on the Little Tennessee River, a \$100 million boondoggle denounced by David Brower, the founder of Friends of the Earth, as “the beginning of the end of the Endangered Species Act.” Following the 1992 election, former Gore staffers moved into key environmental posts at the EPA and elsewhere. There they would benefit would-be polluters such as Disney (which had just been fined for dumping sewage in the Florida wetlands) and food processors (irked by a 1958 ban on carcinogens, soon to be repealed under the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act).

Nevertheless, as far as the public was concerned, nature had no more stalwart defender than Gore. So when Senator Bob Graham of Florida wrote to him in June 1997 about “the growing environmental threat posed by alien (non-indigenous) invasive species,” he received an enthu-

siastic response. In fact, the issue was already on Gore’s mind. A few weeks earlier, he had received a letter signed by a large group of biology professors, including the eminent scholar and ant expert E. O. Wilson, warning that “a rapidly spreading invasion of exotic plants and animals not only is destroying our nation’s biological diversity but is costing the U.S. economy hundreds of millions of dollars annually.” Among the ominous examples cited were the zebra mussel and the invasion of San Francisco Bay by a new exotic species “on the average of once every twelve weeks.”

Gore sprang into action. He reassured Graham that Clinton’s circle of scientific advisers had already established a Biodiversity and Ecosystems Panel, which would “be considering the issue of invasive species and will report their recommendations at the end of the year.” The panel’s chair,

he noted parenthetically, was Peter Raven.

The official White House biography of Peter Raven listed him as the director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, and noted that he held a professorship at Washington University in St. Louis. That description failed to convey the full reach of his power and prestige as America’s leading botanist. Wade Davis, an ethnobotanist at the University of British Columbia, describes Raven as a “total force of nature. He took a staid Midwest botanical garden and put it on steroids, turning it into the greatest institution of its kind on earth.” A former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, *Time* magazine Hero for the Planet, chairman of the National Geographic Society’s Committee for Research and Exploration, Raven was (and is) a hugely influential figure, with a network that extends through academic, government, and corporate bureaucracies.

He originally made his name in scientific circles with a 1964 paper, “Butterflies and Plants: A Study in Coevolution,” written with Paul Ehrlich, a biologist later famous for the dire (and largely unfulfilled) predictions sketched out in his 1968 bestseller, *The Population Bomb*. Like Ehrlich, Raven tended

¹ Overseas, it was another matter, notably in Hitler’s Germany. Nazism’s view of non-native plants was consistent with its view of non-native humans. “As with the fight against Bolshevism, in which our entire Occidental culture is at stake, so with the fight against this Mongolian invader, in which the beauty of our home forest is at stake,” wrote a team of German biologists in 1942 regarding *Impatiens parviflora*, a small plant native to Asia. “In advocating native plants along the Reichsautobahnen,” wrote Stephen Jay Gould, “Nazi architects of the Reich’s motor highways explicitly compared their proposed restriction to Aryan purification of the people.”

to express a gloomy view of the planet's prospects. He regularly lamented the wholesale loss of our biodiversity, brought about by the accelerating extinction of plant and animal species. "We're over the mark anyway in preserving the world's sustainability," he told me in a recent conversation. "We've passed the point at which we can really do that effectively."

Raven's panel set to work and released its report, *Teaming with Life: Investing in Science to Understand and Use America's Living Capital*, in March 1998. The report took a bearish view of the ecological future, sounding an apocalyptic note on the first page:

Collectively, all human beings, including Americans, are playing a crucial role in the sixth major extinction event to occur in the course of more than three billion years of life on Earth.... During the history of the United States, more than 500 of its known species have been eliminated (half of these since 1980) by various causes, including destruction of habitat by human activities or invasive species.

Although the document repeatedly stressed the virtues of biodiversity, it showed little sympathy for "invasive species such as killer bees, zebra mussels, fire ants, and the Mediterranean fruit fly," which were supposedly devastating the natural environment and posing "threats to the health of our human population." The zebra mussel, receiving no thanks for its heroic pollution-control efforts, was singled out for obloquy, having "cost more than \$5 billion just to clean out pipes clogged by extremely densely clustered populations." (A decade later, a careful study by a team of Cornell scientists assessed zebra-mussel damage at one twentieth of that amount over fifteen years.)

Amid the gloom, however, the report identified a ray of hope: genetically modified organisms (GMOs). "It is anticipated that the U.S. market for seeds of genetically modified crops will grow to \$6.5 billion during the next ten years," it noted, "and the annual production value of the plants derived from those seeds will be many times that amount."

The Monsanto Company could not have put it better. This was not

surprising, since Raven (who retired in 2010) and Monsanto were close, both geographically and financially. The Missouri Botanical Garden was located just a few miles from Monsanto headquarters in St. Louis, and it owed much of its explosive growth to the beneficence of the corporation, which was in the process of changing its public identity from a chemical manufacturer and purveyor of Agent Orange to a "life sciences company"—one heavily invested in GMOs. In April 1996, Monsanto CEO Robert Shapiro joined Raven to break ground for the Monsanto Center, a four-story structure designed to house the garden's unique collection of botanical books and dried plants. Monsanto had contributed \$2 million toward the center's construction, and had also donated the land and \$50 million for the Danforth Plant Science Center, another GMO-intensive research facility.

"Monsanto loved Raven," a former senior executive at the company told me. "They were always showing off the Missouri Botanical Garden, bringing important visitors down to meet him, having him give tours, talks. He was definitely our showpiece."

For his part, Raven spoke publicly about the virtues of GMOs. The company's grand scheme was to genetically modify crops—particularly corn, soybeans, and cotton—to render them immune to the glyphosate in Roundup. This would allow farmers to spray weeds without killing the crops. *Teaming with Life* featured a Monsanto photograph of a flourishing bioengineered plant next to a pathetic nonengineered plant obviously about to expire. "Major companies will be, *are*, a major factor if we are going to win world sustainability," Raven told an interviewer in 1999. "There is *nothing* I'm condemning Monsanto for." (In his conversation with me, Raven defended his former patron even more stoutly, noting Monsanto's many civic philanthropies and absolving the company of any ill intent: "They obviously have no interest in poisoning everybody or doing something bad.")

I asked Raven whether his efforts to protect the natural world didn't clash in some way with his support for something very unnatural: GMO technology. "What's natural anymore?" he

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replied. “If we’re going to play God, we might as well be good at it.”

While Monsanto played God during the 1990s, the Clinton Administration had its back—a policy consistent with its corporate-friendly approach to environmental issues. When, for example, the French balked at allowing GMO corn into their country, the president, the secretary of state, the national-security adviser, and assorted U.S. senators pleaded Monsanto’s cause. (The French finally caved when Gore himself phoned the prime minister to lobby on the corporation’s behalf.)² In addition, Washington’s revolving door whirled many Clinton Administration officials onto the Monsanto payroll, while the president’s committee of science and technology advisers included Virginia Weldon, the corporation’s senior vice president for public policy.

The Raven panel’s recommendation to join battle with invasives got rapid traction. “The invasion of noxious weeds has created a level of destruction to America’s environment and economy that is matched only by the damage caused by floods, earthquakes, wildfire, hurricanes, and mudslides,” cried Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt when the report was released. Within a year, Clinton signed Executive Order 13112, creating the National Invasive Species Council “to prevent the introduction of invasive species and provide for their control and to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause.” Among the founding members of the council’s advisory committee was Nelroy E. Jackson, a product-development manager and weed scientist for Monsanto who had helped to develop Roundup formulations specifically for “habitat-restoration markets”—that is, for eradicating invasives.

For all Monsanto’s talk of “life sciences,” the company’s profits, especially in those days, rode on glyphosate. According to Tao Orion’s

² For years, Monsanto’s MON810 corn was the only GMO crop cleared for cultivation within the European Union. In May 2014, however, the French parliament reversed its earlier policy and banned the crop as a threat to the environment.

book, *Beyond the War on Invasive Species*, the compound was originally invented to clean dishwashers and other appliances. Then someone noticed that it destroyed any plant it touched. By the late 1990s, Monsanto’s Roundup revenues were growing at 20 percent a year, and the compound was duly revered inside the corporation. As the former company executive put it to me: “Roundup was God at Monsanto.”

Such divine status was assured by its symbiotic relationship with Monsanto’s bioengineered corn and soybeans. The strategy worked. Farmers were planting GMO crops in ever-increasing amounts—from just over 4 million acres worldwide in 1996 to 430 million in 2013.

The results of this exotic intervention were not so positive, however, for Raven’s treasured biodiversity. The larva of the monarch butterfly, for example, feeds exclusively on milkweed, a plant that glyphosate is tremendously effective at killing: unlike other herbicides, it attacks the milkweed’s roots. As the rain of glyphosate increased, surpassing 141,000 tons on U.S. crops in 2012, the butterfly’s food supply dwindled to the vanishing point. In 1995, at the dawn of the Roundup Ready era, a billion monarchs fluttered over America’s fields; by 2014, the number had fallen to 35 million, and there was talk of declaring the butterfly an endangered species.

Raven remains optimistic about the monarch, citing Monsanto’s “very exciting” plan to foster milkweed growth in noncultivated areas. Such natural oases, however, are few and far between in the Corn Belt. Those that remain are likely to host other invasive plants, such as garlic mustard, denounced as a “serious invader from the east” by Iowa State University, which inevitably recommends “spot applications” of glyphosate as a remedy.

Meanwhile, the growth curve in glyphosate use has steepened, thanks to a practice that began in 2004. Late in the season, many farmers are now spraying the compound on crops that are not bioengineered to resist it, in order to kill them off and produce artificially early harvests.

“You can imagine the residue levels on the damn wheat,” said Charles Ben-

brook, an agricultural economist at Washington State University. “If you buy whole-wheat bread, the glyphosate will be ground up with the whole-wheat kernel and it will be part of the flour. It’s a very high exposure. When they make white flour, the bran gets separated out and is used in the food supply in other places. That bran will have three or four times the concentration of glyphosate, because that’s where the residues are lodged. It’s insanity.”

Over the years, there have been repeated allegations that glyphosate is dangerous for humans—charges vehemently denied by Monsanto and its friends in high places. “Table salt and baby shampoo are more toxic, or as toxic, as glyphosate,” Rand Beers told *60 Minutes* in 2001. Beers, George W. Bush’s assistant secretary of state for international narcotics, was defending the U.S.-funded spraying of a glyphosate-based compound on millions of acres in Colombia as part of an effort to wipe out coca plantations. Despite Beers’s dutiful denials, however, the mixture turned out to be a lot more dangerous than baby shampoo, afflicting the population with painful rashes and other ailments. It also did a fine job of wiping out the vegetables and poultry that made up the local food supply, while often failing to kill the coca plant, its intended target.

This disaster made no difference. Nor did a 1985 EPA study suggesting that glyphosate might give humans cancer, a finding that the EPA reversed in another study six years later. In 2013, a French report on the compound’s carcinogenic effect on rats was withdrawn in the face of an intense lobbying effort by the company. Through thick and thin, Monsanto stuck to its mantra: in the words of a company spokesperson, “All labeled uses of glyphosate are safe for human health and supported by one of the most extensive worldwide human health databases ever compiled on an agricultural product.”

Then came a massive speed bump. This past March, seventeen scientists met in Lyon, France, under the auspices of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, an arm of the World

Health Organization, to assess the carcinogenic potential of several chemicals. The group was led by Aaron Blair, an internationally renowned epidemiologist and the author of more than 450 scientific papers, who spent thirty years at the National Cancer Institute. Among the chemicals they evaluated was glyphosate.

As Blair explained to me, the group reviewed three kinds of data: lab tests on animals, epidemiological studies on humans who had been repeatedly exposed to glyphosate, and “mechanistic” analyses of the ways in which the compound could cause cancer.

The animal studies, Blair said, “found excesses of rare tumors.” Absent glyphosate exposure, the tumors “are really rare. They almost never just occur.” The studies on human beings, conducted in the United States, Canada, and Sweden, pointed to an equally grim conclusion. “They showed a link between people who used or were around glyphosate and an increased risk of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Different studies, in different places, suggested that they might go together.”

According to Blair, there were good grounds to declare that glyphosate definitely causes cancer. This did not happen, he said, because “the epidemiologic data was a little noisy.” In other words, while several studies suggested a link, another study, of farmers in Iowa and North Carolina, did not. Blair pointed out that there had been a similar inconsistency in human studies of benzene, now universally acknowledged as a carcinogen. In any case, this solitary glitch in the data caused the group to list glyphosate as a probable (instead of a definite) cause of cancer.³

The reaction from Monsanto was predictably irate. GMO Answers, a P.R. website put together by the biotech-food industry, featured a host of derisive posts about the study. Sympathetic journalists went to bat on behalf of the lucrative toxin. Hugh Grant, Monsanto’s chairman and CEO, was curtly dismissive: “It’s unfortunate that junk science and

³ When asked about Blair’s report, the Monsanto spokesman reiterated that “glyphosate is not a carcinogen” and cited a 2013 EPA study that concluded, “Glyphosate does not pose a cancer risk to humans.” He also noted that the I.A.R.C., in its own words, identifies cancer hazards “even when risks are very low with known patterns of use or exposure.”

this kind of mischief can create so much confusion for consumers.”

As it had on previous occasions, the company demanded a retraction of the report. When we talked, it didn’t sound as if Blair was likely to do any such thing. “Historically, the same thing happened with tobacco, the same thing happened with asbestos, the same thing happened with arsenic,” he said. “It’s not junk science.”

The French government agreed, promptly banning the sale of Roundup by garden stores in response to Blair’s report. The Colombian authorities meanwhile halted the coca-spraying program, over U.S. government protests. The program had not been a huge success, of course, given the target plant’s remarkable ability to survive the spray.

But unintentional glyphosate resistance is not confined to coca. Although Monsanto scientists had deemed such a development nearly impossible for weeds targeted by the Roundup Ready system, species subjected to prolonged exposure began to adapt and survive even as farmers were harvesting their first bio-engineered crops. “It’s a disaster,” said Benbrook. “As resistant weeds spread and become more of an economic issue for more farmers, the only way they know how to react—the only way that they feel they can react—is by spraying more.” It has now become common for farmers to spray three times a season instead of once, and Benbrook estimates that the extra doses of herbicide will add up to 75,000 tons in 2015.

All of which brings us to horseweed, or mare’s tail, a plant native to North America and once highly prized for its medicinal qualities. It has hairy stems, and grows about four feet tall. A nuisance in corn and soybean fields, it has naturally been a glyphosate target. But in recent years, farmers have been encountering a new kind of mare’s tail: a superweed produced by years of glyphosate treatment. Not only does it refuse to die when drenched with four times the recommended dose but it appears to gain strength from the experience, growing up to eight feet tall, with stems thick enough, according to one farmer, to “stop a combine in its tracks.”

In other words, a very alien invasive, made right here in America. ■

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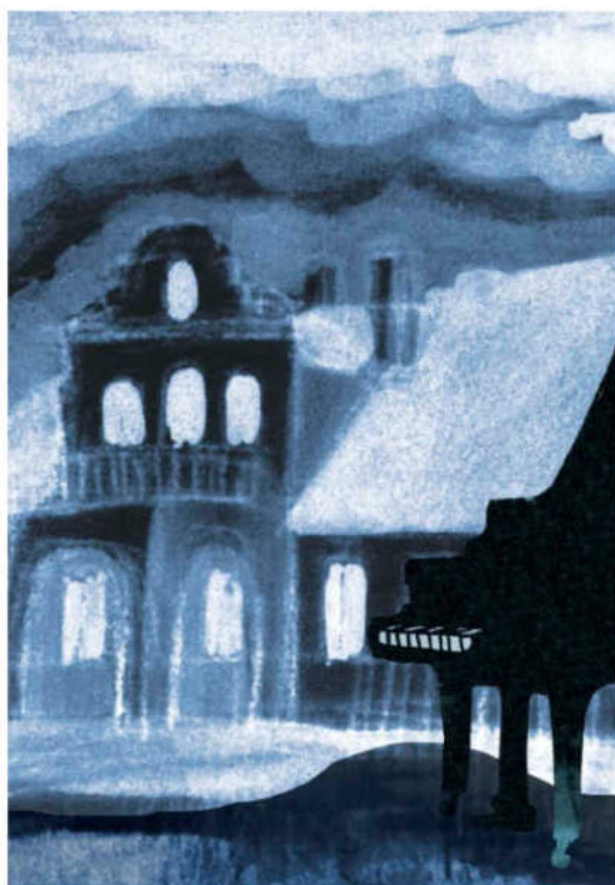
TREMENDOUS MACHINE

By Salvatore Scibona

Spindling, white Fjóra Neergaard, in dun wool slacks, her marble face perched on a whorl of scarves, drove her father's Mercedes through a trash-blown lane of reupholsterers and auto-body shops in a Krakow suburb. She was looking for a sofa.

Her breakfast—a soft-boiled egg, a slice of tomato, two gherkins, and black tea—was over. The morning squall was over, and the attendant downpour was over, and the little flood had drained into the sewers. Her childhood dread of crossing bridges and her allergy to cashews were over. She had vanquished them. But that period when we have the strength to kill dragons by merely throwing a rock at them was also over: the early adult years when our powers are perfect and we either find the work of our prime or we don't. Fjóra Neergaard had not found it. Dieting did not qualify as a vocation. Her dogged attempts to turn it into one had failed; she had not landed a shoot in more than a year. To feel disappointed or to object that fate or fashion had mistreated her

Salvatore Scibona's novel The End (Graywolf) was a finalist for the 2008 National Book Award. His story "The Hidden Person" appeared in the January 2013 issue of Harper's Magazine.



was cheap. She might go on treating her body like the sarcophagus of a virgin martyr if she wanted, but its market value was zero.

For most of the spring, she had been living in torpid exile at her parents' vacant Polish country house, in a state of tedious hunger that, lacking the prospect of an interested camera, served no one and nothing. She read Danish, French, German magazines in the cav-

ernous salon, neatly tearing out the pages as she absorbed the pictures with compulsive jealous agony, and feeding them to the fire, which went green in flickers from the glossy paper. For weeks, her bones luxuriated in the aches and stabs of napping on the hearth rug. Physical discomfort was so often the cost of her little achievements as to have become their reward. Then she got a wild idea: why not employ her father's checkbook to buy a sofa and read her magazines on cushioned furniture? Beyond this ambition—as she cruised the puddled streets, struggling to decipher the Polish exclamations on the signboards—she had no plans.

Her parents, Axel and Annelise, inseparable in work and play, were leveraging other people's debt in Frankfurt, or else skin diving on Majorca.

They couldn't have been at home, in Copenhagen: the maid was not answering the phone there, and where they went the maid went also. Anyway, Axel Neergaard detested extravagance, and he especially detested the extravagant modesty in which Fjóra lived while alone. If she could have tracked him down, he would have agreed to his flower's buying whatever furnishings her coziness required and lazing on them as

long as she liked, watching whatever picnics or storms or revolutions were going on inside her shriveled brain. Her mother on the extension would likewise have agreed—even though (she would have added, in the mother-daughter telephone language of tsks and pauses with which they carried on simultaneous sidebar conversations beneath Axel's notice) Fjóra really must understand that by secluding herself like this she was betraying everybody who cared about her, as well as that formless striving that burned within Fjóra's ribs, privately, shamefully, invisible to anyone else but her mother. The maid thought Fjóra ruined by comfort and would not clean her bathtub.

Communism was freshly over, and you could buy a sweeping agricultural property, complete with a derelict seven-bedroom middle-European manor, for a price that in Paris would have bought you a pair of reliable shoes. Ergo the house in Poland, which contained little more than its floors—oak boards, handsome wool carpets, granite in the bathrooms underfoot and up the walls like a crypt. Immense leadlight windows gave out on cropland and orchards, the glass in quarrels, turbid, centuries old, twisting the light a little. New plaster in the stairwells and the sloping ceilings. You noticed the surfaces, the flouncy old light fixtures: there was so little else in the house.

Her father would no more have taken ownership of the house without arranging for the meticulous erasure of its flaws and for its maintenance in its new trim form than he would have stepped onto an airplane without a necktie, but he never expected that anybody would *live* there. Least of all Fjóra, creature of room service, a girl to whom pastoral breezes and sunshine were poison. Axel Neergaard had merely speculated in a parcel of cut-rate hectares to which a pesky house was attached. The house itself would never appreciate. It was less an asset than a fee. It had one bed.

But now Fjóra would acquire a sofa and have it planted close to the fire, where with any luck a cracking ember would hop onto the upholstery while she slept (dreaming as she sometimes did that she was Napoleon sacking Egypt in a muscly bronze breastplate)

and immolate her, and the sofa, and the rugs, and the house. All of them weightless as smoke. Over, forever.

She turned the Mercedes right, and right again, and right again, around a colossal block of crumbling concrete in which, a placard alleged, a furniture outlet was housed. Yet the building had no proper doors. She parked and climbed the wooden ladder of a loading dock at a gape in the masonry covered with a plastic tarp that dappled her with storm droplets when she pulled it aside. Yellow fluorescent light, in a burst. She entered a warehouse of old sideboards, fiberglass garden tables, love seats with their springs lolling in the open. Chamber after chamber smelling of straw and bleach. She announced herself by making no sound at all and being pretty in a big room.

Clocks and armchairs and old reel-to-reel tape players, but nobody attending them. A lustrous oak door leaned against a wall crowded with mirrors from which the silvering was peeling away. On closer inspection the door was in fact mounted in the wall. She turned its knob and passed down a dark corridor redolent of pine-scented mop water. At the far end of the corridor, a second door, of steel and glass.

Bright light coming through the glass.

She opened it.

She went inside.

A vast room now enclosed her, its columns seeming near collapse from rust, the concrete floor sown in every direction with pianos.

They were tall, squat, brown, black, red, white, newish, antique, on wheels, and on stylized paws. They stood right side up, or upside down, or legless on their shoulders, or aslant against a post with their innards spilled on the floor. Instinctively she surveyed the room for a lavatory in case she should need to vomit.

From a shadowed bulkhead, a wan and carbuncular man emerged. He wore a whipcord jacket and pulled the tail of his tie from between his shirt buttons. Fjóra followed Polish doubtfully, via Russian, but she thought he said, "You tell Constantine to come here himself. I don't talk to lawyers."

"How do you do?" she said in her best accent.

"If he can't manage—" The eyes went down and came up again.

All at once the spotted face rearranged itself. "I beg your pardon. You have caught us at a moment of transition," he said in English. "But if I may be of some help to you it would of course be my sincerest pleasure." He bowed. Customer service was so new here you sometimes saw it taken to such excesses.

His tone was clipped, world-weary, sinister, calm, his speech punctuated with clever profanities about the weather. Shortly, he was sitting at a Schimmel grand, circa 1932, with a strange finish—faded yet shining, like wet coal—and elaborate custom scrollwork around the case. It had a new soundboard and pin block, he said, and fresh hammers furry as peaches, but she had no idea what any of that meant. As to her question about how such an instrument had survived the war, and even, thoughtlessly, in whose home it had presided before the war, the dealer responded, "I couldn't know." In any event, he could tell her, until recently a clerk in the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs had owned the piano. This fellow had quit the country and was not expected—

"And the cost?" she interjected in Polish.

"But you should hear it first. I know an excellent mover, you'll permit me to mention. He also tunes. A father-and-son firm. Those are lovely pants."

She stuck her head under the lid. Hammers beat the strings. She had always assumed a piano worked by plucking. She lowered her face to the mechanism as though to smell it while the dealer played a piece she didn't recognize—until she did recognize it, and then she needed so intensely to be able to play it herself that she believed indeed she could play it, right then. Her sinuses reverberated, and the hairs in her nose itched. The instrument was playing *her*. It was not true that she had never before today played a piano. In a concurrent life, heretofore undetected, she had done little else. The piece was "Clair de Lune." She believed she could play it with her will.

Bent, breathing deep, grinning painfully, strapped within a leather

truss, unaided by anything but himself, with small stolid steps up the narrow foyer stairs, Marek, the young Atlas, carried the enormous instrument on his back into her salon. Under his feet the boards shrieked. The machine was wrapped in twine and blankets. The legs and lyre post had been removed. Down his arm a long skeleton tattoo depicted the bones inside so that the limb looked like a moving X-ray. From this burr-headed and swollen creature Fjóla wished to extract some blood and drink it and become strong.

His father, half the boy's size, waited with her by the fireplace, his hands well scrubbed but stained by grease, unpacking his sprockets. In German he said, "I specialize in Volkswagens and Steinways, but also I work on Audis and Schimmels." She had acquired a very good piano, he explained, as Marek affixed the legs and lyre and righted the instrument amid the twisted surround of the old windows. "But the weather up here will visit hell on every moving part. I might have to adjust the tune four times a year. Who in the household plays?" he asked.

"What household?" the Atlas chirped, looking about him at the cavernous rooms.

His father spoke a chastising Polish syllable, and the boy's countenance deflated like a shamed dog's.

As they were leaving, the father gave her the phone number of a once-famous interpreter of the Baroque masters who had done well enough under the military government to, well, inhibit her prosperity, if you took his meaning, under Solidarity. The nation disgraced itself to reduce a talent such as Katarzyna Kloc to taking new students in her old age, but for the right price paid under the table she would surely do it.

Over the phone, Mrs. Kloc demanded six months' tuition up front.

"Come back to Krakow at once," she said, "and buy this volume which I will say the title if you have a pencil. You must always have a pencil now."

In the striped terrain of newly sprouted sunflowers, flax, and cabbag-

es that led up to the house, a spot appeared. Soon the spot took the shape of a runty and faded white Trabant coupe coming very fast. Clumps of jetsam plastic floated around it like blossom petals in the roadside weeds.



The car slowed in the dip where frost heaves rippled the thin pavement, then raced up the drive and stopped. From the driver-side door, the teacher unfolded herself and stamped up the gravel walk, gripping her purse to her belly, compact and certain in her limbs. A cherry bough overhung the front door. She swatted it out of her way and knocked. She declined tea, coffee, rye crackers. She took a seat in the bay window (there were no chairs), turning her back on the yellow-green world outside. She faced the nearly empty room, the old eyes steady and red. The long bent neck aimed her senses at the piano and the student seated there.

As Fjóla started to play, a shudder twisted up the side of the older woman's face. "Please," she said. "The lullaby is not a burning house to escape. Slow down."

Fjóla proceeded to the C-major scale, which she played almost well.

"How many times you have practiced this since we spoke?"

"I don't know," Fjóla said, "about five hundred?"

Mrs. Kloc told her to repeat it, whereupon the scale reverted to a rant, more emphatic and garbled each time Fjóla tried to start it again.

The only language they had in common was French.

After a quarter of an hour, Mrs. Kloc remarked in passing, "For rea-

son of my fee I will come out here, but one must say—you will not succeed. The body is not the right body. The biceps, forearm, are lank. Like mousse. Even the chest, if I may say, is meager. Spirit requires, to express itself, the appropriate vehicle. Imagine the car that whines—the belts move on the pulleys, but the belts are frayed. Today or tomorrow they will break. *Pfft.* There! But proceed."

From Fjóla's dark, superficial eyes, cool and peaceful-seeming, no trace emerged of the workings of her private mind.

She continued to the Hanon drills. The crystal chandelier floated above like a particulate octopus about to dive and murder them.

Her pearlish body grew slick.

She descended into such a panic of repeated drills that when Mrs. Kloc told her to stop, the hands kept going on their own, and the old woman had to reach over the keyboard and grab them. Mrs. Kloc recoiled at once, as though Fjóla's be-deviled hands had shocked her.

"What? What did I do?" Fjóla asked.

"Why didn't you tell me? You're burning alive!" Mrs. Kloc said. "To become ill I cannot afford."

"I'm not ill," Fjóla said. "I'm just warm."

"You must understand this is a superb instrument. Not an exercise device for sweating."

"Yes."

"This instrument is more important than you."

"Yes, all right."

"You must comport yourself before it as before your last possession."

From the beginning she played seven hours a day, to a maximum of nine, six days a week. She ate canned herring in oil, or brown bread, which she kept on an upturned box next to the piano, along with her pencil and practice notebook, cigarettes, and a spoon. Housekeepers she never saw tidied all this on Fridays, when she made herself go to Krakow and drink among the riffraff at a bar of labyrinthian halls and many dark rooms, where she escaped the notice of predatory lurkers and read

under a lamp. The bar was a Noah's ark of pub décor from the world over. Whiskey barrels, bagpipes, and Chinese paper dragons hung at irregular intervals from the ceiling and eaves; also embossed metal advertisements for Indian beer, mandolins, violins, old saws, clam rakes, sub-Saharan tribal statuary, plastic prawns stuck in nets. Above the cash register, a wooden rabbi the size of a Christmas-tree ornament dangled upside down. It was autumn already, and the first smell of wood smoke pervaded every room. Fjóla was beautiful here, observant, wild with loneliness, as at peace as the bricks in the paving. The bar was called Café Devil Heaven.

Then a hulk squeezed past her table, excusing himself on his way to the darkly glowing Wurlitzer. His nylon jacket was embroidered on the back with the silhouettes of a piano and a race car. It was not such a big town. If she looked at the back hard enough he would turn around and be the Atlas, Marek. The opening power chords of a ballad by a Norwegian metal band concussed the room. The hulk went on pressing buttons with his back to her. No, but looking hard did not suffice; she had to want hard, and wait.

The great nylon back came about like a square sail in the wind.

Marek pointed, grinning in recognition, bowed up to her table, and insisted that she dance with him. He had the blindly cheerful eyes of a North American tourist.

"No," she responded over the music. She looked at her magazine. There was a servile interview with a smelly little ad-agency art director who had once told her that her clavicles were too suppressed to model his client's clothes. She whipped over the page.

"Yes, or I shall cry," Marek said in English.

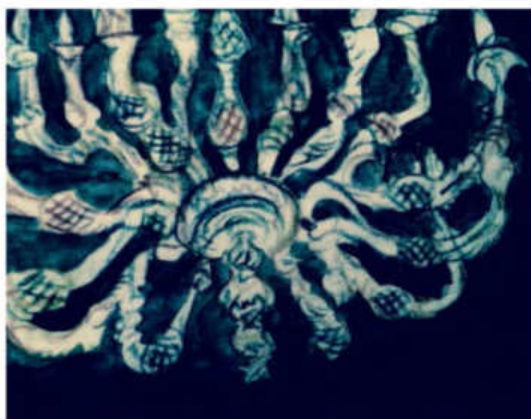
"You don't even remember who I am."

"I do. You are Ewa or Mary. And you were reading at Devil Heaven. Sadness. But then you danced. See?"

She ordered some aquavit for herself while Marek loomed, pleading. She paid the hoyden waitress with a

handful of coins spilled on the table. He extracted a few serrated cupronickel pieces from this pile and made Fjóla take them back while the waitress poured abuse on him. When Fjóla recognized the abuse as a flirtation, she interrupted to say, "All right, I'll dance."

Once, she had waltzed with a commodore in the Danish navy, a sleek dope who believed her when she told him she had been on the cover of the Japanese edition of *Marie Claire*. But he had had



an intelligent body, and its contact made her body intelligent too as they moved, in opposition but in concert across the floor of an ambassador's residence in Copenhagen, revolving and also spinning, in epicycles, and yet they did not get dizzy somehow, both free and both constrained. A wondrous airy nothing under her feet. She said, "I don't want it to end!" He offered her two gelatin capsules—the slang for them was "Rockslide." Then there was a bathroom upstairs, going into a bathroom with him, a chenille peacock on the bath mat. She woke up in a hotel bed three days later—she would later learn it was three days—mad with thirst, and called down for diet Fanta and mineral water. But the concierge spoke no Danish. What? Because she was in Brussels. And she was fifteen years old. And had a terrible headache. Terrible behind the one eye and wandering behind the other. And Mother and Father were in Turkey looking at statues, or buying them.

Marek's form of dancing, on the other hand, was more a pantomime of sexual intercourse. Fjóla let him go on while his friends, or whoever

they were, all these people who knew him or admired him the way strong people are admired, hooted and clapped. Into her ear he declared, "I am whatever I am, but I do love cars and motorcycles."

Once outside with him she was still warm as always, though she wore a flimsy dress that might have been laundered in a soup bowl.

Fog moved low on the street. People came and went from the bars, the alone ones smeared with contempt, principally for themselves. The low moon shone like a watchtower light on the ratty square, where shiftless young people milled amid disused tenements, the residents of which had been rounded up and gassed fifty years earlier. She knew this from a book. She had found no signs or monuments. She asked Marek about the rabbi. She just asked him. "That is merely a custom," he said. "Because if you hang him with the head up, the money will not fall out of his pockets."

From a kiosk Marek bought them each a split baguette with pizza toppings on it. He still hadn't bothered to ask her name. Rain fell. They took shelter under an awning. Cars drove through the rain and, by way of parking, humped the curb with two wheels.

By the time the two of them were driving to the farm, Marek's English had lapsed and he distended himself in the leather of her father's car, rhapsodizing on the brand. He kept repeating the word "Mercedes" among slurred Slavicisms.

It had not rained here, and smoke pervaded the breeze. The farm tenant had left an immense pile of chaff burning in his field. Marek and Fjóla walked single file up the foyer stairs.

She never remembered the commodore's name. Later, she did remember a car, waking up in daylight in a car on a seaside highway, and then a room, about to enter the room, about to enter the room with the nameless commodore, thinking, Now I'll go in there forever.

When she went into the dark salon, the piano was like a seal asleep, fat and noble. She didn't dare go near it. To be even a little drunk in

its presence embarrassed her. She unwrapped her scarves and turned on the current in the chandelier.

The Atlas, gnawing an apple, stared with bafflement and then illumination at the instrument he had put there.

"You are Fjóla!" he crowed. "The Danish girl."

The only way out had been to buy a piano. That she had had no musical education proved that she must now undertake one. That she had never much cared for music before demonstrated the salvation it would provide her.

At a lesson Mrs. Kloc said, "Sitting as you sit with bench so high, the muscles of lumbar vertebrae must be in condition of perpetual spasm. You are certain you are not in severe pain?"

Fjóla thought a moment. She said, "Quite certain."

"On the whole you rotate nicely. But the move to five finger, here, is not possible. I do not say unsound. This is past unsound." She gripped Fjóla's forearm in demonstration. "You have carpal bones that should prevent that motion. You should already be injured. Furthermore, the hours you play are far too many."

The only way out had been to buy a piano: thus whim with time and effort made fact.

Her memory of the witchlike dealer playing "Clair de Lune" made it seem eventually within her powers, but then she bought a tape of it and listened in the car and discovered that he had played only the first section, and that the middle section required a burbling legato facility she would need twenty years to achieve at this pace.

Six months later, she had it. She had the whole thing.

"You are moving like a tremendous machine," Mrs. Kloc conceded.

One morning the next winter, Marek shouted from the kitchen, "Fuck these fucking knives. Shit."

Fjóla did not break off training her mulish finger to make this stupid acciaccatura in the Schumann she was learning. Her attention was a bot-tomless descent.

"I am overfucked with these clubs you have for knives," Marek said, coming into the salon with a plate of venison sausage sawn in fat slabs and a bleeding finger in his mouth.

"Let me have some!" she said.

"Of course," he said in Polish, uncorking his mouth. "It's for you. I almost died for it. I left half the pepper from the rind on the cutting board because you're so cheap."

He looked at the hand. His fat mouth twisted in revulsion. The finger bled, the dark blood shone like melted chocolate. The focus in his eyes drifted. He teetered like a tree in a storm.

"Don't be dramatic. Give it here," she said.

He put the dried meat between her teeth and she tore at the sinews with one hand while the other kept on playing. Salt and fat erupted in her mouth. Matter turned to energy by means of pleasure.

Then she heard it, the shadow beat, she had played it, was playing it again—rather her hand played it while the mind pursued its food—a little note, nearly inaudible, succinct but fleeting. *There*, and gone. She had it, her hand had it. A little note crushed by the big notes around it. Like a chick in a fist.

Mrs. Kloc insisted that Fjóla schedule the next tuning for a lesson day.

"You don't hear it? *Pleek*. Agony!"

It was E-flat to Marek's father, but it was not flat enough.

The old people argued across the echoing salon while the young people, Fjóla and Marek, settled a ponderous pane of beveled plate glass atop a new coffee table. Marek had constructed this table out of the legs of an antique bed and the mul-lions of a fancy door, all salvaged from a demolition site in the old city where he'd taken side work. Once assembled, the rococo styling of the old wood amid the austerity of her salon made the table look like a child dressed as a silly monarch in a school play.

"The ear does not lie," Mrs. Kloc said.

"Quite right," the old man responded.

On the other side of the room, Marek said, "Does it not match the piano? I thought that it would."

"Of course it does," Fjóla lied, except, stepping back to look, the Frankenstein table did match the piano. The effect repulsed her.

Her Polish had gotten much better. She understood Mrs. Kloc to say, "No, it was perfect," and Marek's father to respond with sudden exasperation and at a tempo Fjóla should not have been able to comprehend, "How do you know what Constantine's clowns did to it?"

This precipitated a row.

Later, in Krakow, Fjóla was asking Marek about the fight his father had pitched with Mrs. Kloc, which had acquired gratuitous dimensions. "It was a professional disagreement and then—who is Constantine? Your father said his name, and she—I've never seen her lose her despot cool before."

"Okay, but Father apologized."

"For what? Did he tell you?"

"That was a punch in the kidney to bring up Constantine. Father is often carefuller, but she questioned his pitch! I mean he lost—he did not mean it. He tried to take it back and she did not let him."

"Who is Constantine?"

"Like you make a joke at my English. And I am hurt. And I let you take back your joke. Humanity. She should let him take it back. But no."

"But I said who is Constantine?"

"That you bought your piano from him," Marek said.

"Who—the transport person?"

"What?"

"The owner was some bureaucrat in the transport ministry who left the country."

"Buy me cheeseburger, please, won't you?"

"Is it stolen—or looted? I *knew* it—you people. Why didn't you tell me? I have to know."

"You do not *have* to know, do you?"

In the market where they were walking, she pretended to study an open crate of plums filmed with glaucous wax. "You're right. I change my mind. I don't want to know," she said.

"Guess."

"Her son," she blurted.

"Worse."

"Her boyfriend."

"Constantine was her bookkeeper," Marek said. "I suppose he did work maybe for government someplace also. Not for Transport. Maybe in Ministry of Leaving Old Women with Debts all over Krakow. Father always recommends her."

"So she owes you money, you're saying."

"Sweetheart, I want you to buy me a motorcycle. A Yamaha." He said the word with quiet lust. "I know the model. Say that you will think about it."

"I'm going to ask you a question. Don't pretend you don't understand me. Did I buy Mrs. Kloc's piano?"

He thought a minute. "Take that back," he said.

"What."

"Take it back, that question."

"Why?"

"Fine—because you should let her have her pride," he said. "There, I ruined it."

They bought some onions and pork ribs for a soup. Her parents were visiting. "I like it better with your barley at the end than with your egg dumplings," she said placatingly.

"Egg has octane—proctane—help me."

"Protein."

"You enjoy Mrs. Kloc?"

"Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I wish I hadn't asked."

"More than me?"

"Funny boy," she said and patted his X-ray tattoo. It was her favorite part of him to touch. They didn't have the kind of rapport in which she might have asked him what the tattoo meant or why he'd gotten it. They had the kind in which she gripped it while they were fucking and thereby felt an electric knowledge of death at this moment of utmost life. A fathomless nothing surrounded us, and she could touch it. The disparity between life and death obliterated. Nobody knew that sometimes when she had starved herself to shreds, lightning ran in her veins, she was so alive.

The viscous soup was black as earth: he had roasted the bones before he boiled them. They served it in plastic bowls in the dining room,

outfitted with scraps of lumber Marek had knocked together and painted to make a table and chairs. Earlier in the winter he had also found a second bed and mattress, for her parents. Out of consideration for what he imagined were their feelings, Marek did not stay the night but went home to the pallet he used in his father's attic. He had a key to her house now and came and went as the spirit moved him.

Fjóla was asleep when her mother's wiredrawn shape appeared in the doorway.

"You have been—"

"May I sleep, Mother?"

"—you have been practicing?"

"That's none of your business."

"We didn't get to talk just us two without the men."

"Of course. But nothing about, 'Your shape was perfect like it was.'"

"What? You look," she said, "strong."

"None of it, none of it," Fjóla sputtered.

The sheets were already dampish from her sweating. Her mother stifled a sneeze and got in the bed. "Your father worries," she said.

"Will you scratch, please?" Fjóla said. "What in the world is the matter with what I'm doing? I want to be good at something. Why does it feel like some moral lapse that everybody else sees but me and I should be ashamed of it?"

"That is a very fine question, and I love you very much," her mother said. She hummed, scratching Fjóla's scalp.

Fjóla sniffled.

"He wants almost the same as I do, your father," her mother said.

"I hope it's not too much of a burden, my staying here."

"A burden, why? But what are you doing besides practice? I mean your friend didn't stay, so I'm assuming—"

"That is none of your business."

"Okay, but we have to be good animals to be good saints, my darling."

"You are not *fair*. I never tried to be a saint."

In the morning, while the women were having their coffee, Axel Neergaard came in from the snow wearing wool hunting clothes like a petty nobleman from the time of King Christian the Tenth. He had

brought fishing gear but knew the property so little that after the whole morning on foot he had failed to find the trout stream he was sure was referenced somewhere in his deed.

For lunch they went to the city. Annelise could not persuade Axel to change out of his squiring outfit. Mud flaked his trouser cuffs.

She was the most beautiful blond woman, Annelise Neergaard. She never ate breakfast, but her skin, her hair, everything thrived. She ate when hungry, which was seldom. She was like the Republic of Costa Rica, which had long ago abolished its military: her lack of defenses guaranteed her safety. The Neergaards still owned a beach property there. Yet in her earlobes, in the texture of the skin above her sternum, the first incontestable signs had emerged of the struggle with time, an invisible tide.

"We could be in Rio or Bangkok or San Francisco," said Annelise, looking up at the shell of a giant tortoise dangling from the rafters. They were at Devil Heaven eating, from hollowed bread bowls, a soup of fermented rye broth with bits of meat floating in it.

Her father slurped with gusto.

Fjóla said, "I know. You'd think history never happened."

"Do you want them to put it on the menu?" Axel said.

"I mean, but no sign at all, Daddy? Am I missing something?"

"Deportation Memorial Salade Niçoise," he said.

"Or Malta," said Annelise. "Why am I feeling Malta? And no, she's not blaming you, Axel—or capitalism or the World Bank."

"Honey, I'm sorry, but you don't remember the milk bars. I was here ten years ago. You had to pay a bribe to get a strawberry—to get the address of the person you had to bribe before he would tell you if he had any strawberries to sell."

"Darling, you were here *with me*. I'm the one who paid for the address. Don't appropriate my anecdote. It is eerie," she said, turning to Fjóla. "The effacement."

"You haven't seen these charming figurines, Daddy, the rabbis with the beards and the noses?"

"Have I?" Axel Neergaard inserted a turnip in his mouth and chewed it.

There was a terrible pause of the kind families abhor and fill with what they consider banalities and others visiting them consider their characteristic genius or corruption. Then Axel Neergaard said, "You seem to have constructed a kind of life here."

"Speaking of pianos," her mother interrupted.

"I was not speaking strictly of pianos. I was speaking of—"

"We have found a buyer for the estate," said Annelise.

"Is this really the time?" Axel said.

"What estate—what are you doing? What have you been up here for? I thought you wanted to be close to me," Fjóla said.

"We weren't looking very hard," Axel said.

"Please don't be sentimental," her mother said. "We can get you a Bechstein or whatever the top-of-the-line is these days. Or we can pack up the piano you have now and take it home with us. Don't do this. Put some iron in your ribs."

"This isn't about your investments at all."

"Please don't cry," Axel said.

"Stop making me hide!" Fjóla said.

"Do you think we can have a clear conscience letting you live like this?" said Annelise. "I feel like you're committed to being a vagrant and I'm paying for your tent and can opener. I won't have it. Your father won't have it. Your father loves you."

"You want to make sure and keep pretending nothing happened. You're exactly like—" Fjóla waved at the room, the establishment, the signless square outside. She was speaking just loud enough to be heard over the death-metal music coming from behind the bar.

"It is vulgar and supercilious and self-dramatizing to make comparisons like that," said Annelise. "You mustn't make comparisons between yourself and big things. My brother did that. Axel, do you remember the poem about how his divorce was like the expulsion of the Germans from Pomerania?"

"What comparison?" Axel said.

"With her—"

"Compared how?"

"With—with what she says happened to her," said Annelise.

"Ah," Axel said, releasing a slow, patient, sympathetic sigh.

Annelise lowered her voice, "When she called us in Istanbul. From that hotel."

"Nothing happened, my flower," Axel said.

"It didn't?" Fjóla asked through confused but resilient tears. Her hair was coming down, but she didn't put it back up.

"Tell her again," her mother said.

He said with careful force, "Nothing has ever happened."

"Daddy, I've tried as hard as I can."

"Nothing happened."

"I mean I've tried to push it away. It's getting better, but I have to stay here. I can't go back and be with you two the way I was. I felt like a deer in the basement."

"My flower."

"Don't."

"Darling, fix your hair," her mother said.

"Don't touch it, please," Fjóla said.

"Nothing happened," her father said. "Nothing has ever happened."

"It didn't?"

"No," he said.

Marek was supposed to meet her for a goodbye drink.

They had always maintained that they were good friends who liked to screw sometimes. Men liked to preserve such treaties and women to undermine them in the direction of love. But unless Fjóla misunderstood her own feelings, the roles in the present case were reversed. Marek wept and said he had taken the demolition jobs in order to save enough to take her away for a weekend to someplace romantic like Vilnius and propose that she should marry him. On hearing this, the iron came into Fjóla's ribs for real.

"Please don't be sentimental," Fjóla said.

He didn't know the word. Then he did know it and for a moment she avidly prepared herself to be beaten by him at last. He stood—he had never been bigger, they ate so well together—and barreled away past the tenements.

Over the phone she explained to Mrs. Kloc that because she would be

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leaving the country she would have to end their lessons and that she wanted to give Mrs. Kloc her instrument.

"Why? I don't want it."

The response she formed in Danish in her mind—*because I want you to have it again*—came out of her mouth in French precisely so, except she caught herself in time and did not say the indiscreet word "again."

"That is not why," Mrs. Kloc laughed. The laugh was harsh and vengeful. "I said you would fail. To push and push and push. As though everything can be yours, from pushing.

And now you have failed.

And you are ashamed."

It was a week before Marek took one of her calls. She wanted to meet and leave things on more friendly terms. "Friendly" wasn't the right word, but he understood, didn't he? He said he would think about it and hung up. He called back five minutes later and told her a date and time.

She may have written it down wrong, however there was no doubt they had implicitly agreed to meet at Devil Heaven. Yet after a half hour he hadn't shown up. After another half hour he still hadn't shown up. She looked around the many rooms full of the people who might have been her friends. She had drunk a bit too much and headed home.

Fjóla Neergaard was at that time too old to be a girl, too underdeveloped at the hips and bosom to have become an adult, although she was in fact twenty-six years old. Her parents had raised her in a suitcase that went everywhere in the world where bond traders needed a corporation's finances vetted for incompetence and graft. In general she had owned only what could be folded, stowed, or used up, and had never before the piano bought anything as substantial as a toaster. She would take it with her back to Copenhagen. Or she wouldn't. The thing itself didn't matter. She spoke six languages with timid exactitude but her mother tongue with an unplaceable accent. Even in Copenhagen people thought she

was a foreigner. She had had no Polish before coming here, but she did have a habit, which often distracted her peace of mind, of eavesdropping and acquiring the rules by which a language she didn't know could be deciphered from one she did. Who would have thought music was just another language she could pick up as easily as Dutch?

She picked things up in order to put them down again. To have money is to never have to keep anything, except the money.

She drove up the long, dark, country highway in which the headlights of the car were blue and wicked. The car rattled over the rippled pavement in the dip below the farm. She swerved into the drive and nearly smashed into a truck that for some reason was parked there. It was his truck. He had come to plead his case in private, poor boy. And the moment she cut the engine, she heard him crying out for help.

The door of the house was ajar and she could push it open only partway because Marek's stretched arm on the floor impeded it. The rest of him lay crosswise, suspended in mid-fall along the foyer stairs, with his face pressed to the landing below and her piano on top of him. The rear lobe of the piano was pinning him down between the shoulder blades. In his evident haste he had not removed the legs and lyre post, and a leg had landed on the back of one of his knees. The busted lyre had snapped a vein. His lovely blood soaked the carpet runners. His lungs were straitened and his breathing was shallow and fast. He emitted a piteous, piercing, grotesque sound like the whinnying of a lamed horse.

The carpet came from Tunisia.

"Forgive me," he gasped at the floor.

The instrument was splayed across the narrow stairway so she could not get around to see how the key block had lodged on the upper steps. The stout wooden rod that usually kept the lid open jutted out and obstructed where she wanted to place her step. She raised her foot till her thigh hung perpendicular to the rest of her, braced herself against the wall, raised her foot higher, and

pounded down with all her weight, smashing the rod in half.

The machine inched farther down the stairs.

"Where I am?" he said. "I can't see you anymore!"

Fjóla's feet were now free to straddle the stairs at either side of his head. She bent low, gripping the edges of the piano where it dug into the straps of the truss across his back. His shirt was wet with sweat and he smelled of beer and Marek.

One does not use the back but the legs, she had gathered from watching him—the thighs and hams, all the abdominal muscles that attached to the pelvis.

The knees came forward, the pelvis down, down further. Then the shoulders started coming up.

The whole apparatus of her was in motion, free, and constrained by her adversary, this weight, the big thing beneath her that was coming up, as she was coming up. When it moved, she moved.

A deep long breath sighed into him, then out, and he cried, "Don't leave me here!" in delirium, under her hips.

When she moved, it moved. A sound like fever humming the brain when the dampers fell off all the strings. *Nothing* of her own was involved. She did not will or want. She *did*. An ever-present power gushing out of the earth, into her feet, right through the top of her head, burning her up like a wick, turning her into nothing but heat.

A queasy sneering sound, as when a bow is dragged the wrong way up a violin string. A sound coming out of her hands—a sound of the thing slipping out of her hands. But not all the way. Not yet. She had intervened in an equilibrium and destabilized it. And the power came up cockeyed through her hips now, so that she was leaning a little backward. If the piano fell out of her hands at this point it would come down on the back of Marek's stippled neck and snap it.

Her hands, between her spread legs, were as high as her hip pockets. She needed a few more inches before the lyre post would free his leg.

I have nothing left, she thought, and I will use it. ■

A GOOSE IN A DRESS

In which our intrepid restaurant critic submits to the dreams and excesses of New York's most fashionable eateries

By Tanya Gold



Per Se ("Through Itself") lives on the fourth floor of the Time Warner Center, a shopping mall at Columbus Circle, close to Central Park. It is by reputation—which is to say gushing reviews and accolades and gasps—the best restaurant in New York City. And so I, a British restaurant critic, commissioned to review the most extrava-

Tanya Gold is the restaurant critic for The Spectator.

gant dishes of the age, borne across the ocean on waves of hagiography, arrive at Through Itself expecting the Ten Commandments in cheese straws.

There are three doors to Through Itself; two are real, one is fake. The fake door is tall and blue and pleasing, with a golden knocker. It is a door from a fairy tale. The real doors are tinted glass, and glide by themselves, because no customer at Through Itself can be expected to do

anything as pedestrian as open a door. I'm not aware of this, so I tug at the fake door, giggling, until rescued by an employee, whom I remember only as a pair of bewildered shoulders. I am made "comfortable in the salon," as if ill or a baby, with a nonalcoholic mojito. It is a generic luxury "salon," for they are self-replicating: a puddle of browns and golds, lit by a fire with no warmth. There is a copy of something called *Finesse* magazine,



which is an homage to *Through Itself*, and whose editorial mission, if it has one, is “canapé advertorial.”

Through Itself is not a restaurant, although it looks like one. It may even think it is one. It is a cult. It was created in 2004 by Thomas Keller of The French Laundry, in Yountville, California. He is always called Chef Keller, and for some reason when I think of him I imagine him traveling the world and meeting international tennis players. But I do not need to meet him; I am eating inside his head.

Phoebe Damrosch, a former waiter at *Through Itself*, wrote a book called *Service Included*, a marvelously prosaic title with a misleading subtitle: *Four-Star Secrets of an Eavesdropping Waiter*. Damrosch does not eavesdrop on her customers—she is too bewitched for that—but on herself. “There were philosophies,” she writes, “laws, uniforms, elaborate rituals, an unspoken code of honor and integrity, and, most important, a powerful leader.”

If the restaurant is a cult, what then is the diner? A goose in a dress of course, a hostage to be force-fed a nine-course tasting menu by Chef Keller and his acolytes. Here the chef is in control. The client, meanwhile, is a masochist waiting to be beaten with a breadstick, spoiled with minute and sumptuous portions that satisfy, and yet incite, one’s

greed. The restaurant seethes with psychological undercurrents and tiny pricks of warfare. It is not relaxing.

The dining room: sixteen tables on two levels, with views of Columbus Circle and Central Park. The walls are beige, with hangings that look like oars that could not row a boat; the carpet is brown, with cream squiggles. It is gloomy and quiet, the only sound a murmur. My companion thinks it looks like an Ibis hotel, with a chair for your handbag, or an airport lounge in Dubai.

The menu is oddly punctuated and capitalized: “Oysters and Pearls”; “Tsar Imperial Ossetra Caviar”; “Salad of Delta Green Asparagus”; “Hudson Valley Moulard Duck Foie Gras ‘Pastrami’”; “Charcoal Grilled Pacific Hamachi”; “Maine Sea Scallop ‘Poêlée’”; “Champignons de Paris Farcis au Cerveaux Truffé”; “Elysian Fields Farm’s ‘Selle d’Agneau’”; “Jasper Hill Farm’s ‘Harbison’”; “Assortment of Desserts.”

How does the food taste? To ask that is to miss the point of *Through Itself*. This food is not designed to be eaten, an incidental process. It is designed to make your business rival claw his eyes out. It could be a yacht, a house, or a valuable, rare, and miniature dog. But I can tell you that the cornet of salmon—world famous in canapé circles—is crisp and light and I enjoyed it; that there are six kinds of table salt and two exquisite lumps of butter, one shaped like a miniature beehive and another shaped like

a quenelle; that a salad of fruits and nuts has such a discordant splice of flavors it is almost revolting; that the lamb is good; and that, generally, the food is so overtended and overdressed I am amazed it has not developed the ability to scream in your face, walk off by itself, and sulk in its room.

It rolls out with precise, relentless expertise. The waiters are dehumanized, reduced to multiple efficient arms. “The Cappuccino of Forest Mushrooms,” Damrosch writes,

called for one person to hold the soup terrine on a tray, one to hold mushroom biscotti, the mushroom foam, and the mushroom dusting powder (à la cinnamon) on a tray, and one to serve the soup. If a maître d’ stepped in to help, he made four. If the sommelier happened to be around pouring wine, he became a fifth. The backserver pouring water and serving bread made six.

I don’t think they like the customers. Perhaps they are annoyed that *Through Itself* charges a 20 percent “service fee” for private dining—Service Not Included?—and does not pass it on to them. (As this essay went to press, New York State concluded that *Through Itself* had violated state labor law and would pay \$500,000 in reparations to the affected employees.) Or perhaps the clients are too greedy? In *Service Included*, Damrosch rages against a customer who seeks extra canapés: “Extra canapés are a gift from the chef and to ask for them, even if you are willing to pay, would be like calling a dinner guest and telling them that instead of a bottle of wine or some flowers, you would like them to weave you a new tablecloth.” Surely this would be comparable only if your theoretical dinner guest owned a tablecloth factory? The waiter, a man with huge arms, presumably from carrying a city of plates, asks: “How is your drink?” “Watery,” I say, since he asked. Another is brought and he is here again, prodding: “How is your fauxjito?” It’s hard to be afraid of someone who says “fauxjito” with such emphasis, but I think I have hurt his feelings; things are not the same after that. During the

cheese course, when I do not understand whether the cheese is an alcoholic or a recovering cheese, he asks me, very slowly: “Do you understand what I am saying?” Each word is followed by a full stop. I have never found servility quite so threatening.

The provenance of the cheese is part of the cult. Through Itself has commissioned a book about its suppliers, who are, gaily, trapped inside some of the maddest copywriting I have ever read. For instance: “In the rolling hills of Sonoma, perched atop a fog-covered ridge, a conductor orchestrates the transformation of humble milk into some of the finest cheeses in America.” This, on *Animal Farm* in Orwell, Vermont, is self-pitying, as well as being a very self-conscious and buttery critique of Communism: “To make butter, one must be willing to sacrifice a measure of free will and live according to the needs of animals.” If all farmers were this credulous, the world would starve.

Animal Farm has a cow named Keller—as in Major, Snowball, Napoleon, and Keller—and, now that I think of it, why shouldn’t a butter farm criticize Communism, give George Orwell a kick, and then, one day, execute its cow/chef? I am certain that Wendy’s has something to say about Alexis de Tocqueville, and maybe McDonald’s does, too, but about Jean-Jacques Rousseau? Some passages are merely odd; for instance, this, from Devil’s Gulch Ranch, in Nicasio, California: “Rabbits are important.” Do they rustle rabbits at Devil’s Gulch, or just keep them in pens? This is the countryside idealized, trivialized, and made ridiculous; this is Marie Antoinette’s *Petit Trianon* in a mall.

Animal Farm may be a metaphor for the anxieties of those who dine at Through Itself: they are hungry, but only for status; loveless, for what love could there be when a waiter must stand with his feet exactly six inches apart, as related in *Service Included*? Through Itself is such a preposterous restaurant, I wonder if a whole civilization has gone mad and it has been sent as an omen to tell us of the end of the world—not in word, as is usual, but in salad.

Nor am I sure that the human body is meant to digest, at one sitting, many kinds of over-laundered fish and meat. Perhaps this is a dining experience designed for a yet-to-be-evolved species of human? Because later, in my hotel room, a frightening expanse of gray carpet in Midtown near the Empire State Building, I put aside the souvenirs of Through Itself—menu, pastries, chocolates—and vomit half of \$798.06. That is my review: a writer may scribble her fantasies but a stomach never lies. It could have been jet lag, I suppose, but I think it was disgust. Those poor little nuts. They deserved better.

Eleven Madison Park is on the ground floor of the Metropolitan Life North Building. This skyscraper was designed to be a hundred stories high; then the 1929 Wall Street crash, like the finger of God, accurate and pitiless, decapitated it at the thirty-second floor. This is a grand restaurant built by insurers, seemingly intended to entertain something inhumanly large—a ship, for instance. If a ship could walk and eat and hold a conversation, it would come

like tiny stick men. It is less horrifying than Through Itself, though some of the diners—birthday parties and lovers?—are giggling at their courage in attempting a tasting menu and all the whimsy it requires.

This restaurant “focuses on the extraordinary agricultural bounty of New York and on the centuries-old culinary traditions that have taken root here.” The chef is Daniel Humm. His food is brought on a fantastical array of china plates and silverware in fabulous permutations. Pretzels on silver hooks? Ornamental charcoal? Dry ice? Internal organs? Domes?

It is ragingly tasteless. One tiny dish of salmon, black rye, and pickled cucumber is, we are told, “inspired by immigrants.” Were they very tiny immigrants? Our main waiter—an efficient woman with a calmly quizzical face, who manages the spiel without once acknowledging its absurdity—repeats it with no intonation but with a twist: “based on the immigrant experience.” Only a person with limited access to immigrants would design a paean to their native cuisine—in this case, Ashkenazi Jewish—within a \$640.02 meal (service included) and



here. Freud’s ghost is everywhere in this bright void where light flies through the windows in great shafts, bouncing against gold and brown, and diners float

expect anything other than appalled laughter, or a burp of shame. This is the anti-intellectualism—and pretension—of this particular age of excess.

The secondary waiter is simply a human trolley with a rectangular face and obedient eyebrows; he holds the things for the first waiter to place on the table and rushes away on his feet/wheels.

The Hudson Valley Foie Gras ("Seared with Brussels Sprouts and Smoked Eel") is divine; the Widow's Hole Oysters ("Hot and Cold with Apple and Black Chestnuts") are excellent if weirdly capitalized; but the remarkable thing is the turnip course. A turnip, as you know, should be allowed to be a turnip; that is for the best. A turnip is a humble root vegetable, and should not be expected to close a Broadway musical, solve a financial crisis, or achieve self-consciousness through the application of technology. But here Turnip—with Variations in its Own Broth (in honor of Johann Sebastian Bach?)—is presented without even a carrot for company. The chef—was it actually Humm?—wanted to save the turnip from itself and remake it as something wonderful, because then—then!—he could have proved something to himself. What that is, we will never know; some people can speak only in vegetable. The chef should not have bothered. It is entirely revolting, and the most grievous result of the cult of chef I have yet witnessed. Could no one have told him, "Don't bother with the turnip course, you're wasting your time, it's a turnip"? Bah! Surrounded by acolytes—by enablers—the chef dreams his turnipy dreams and does things to turnips that should not be done to any root vegetable.

Presently, as if we were not amazed enough by the transubstantiation of the turnip, they bring a golden, inflated pig's bladder in a dish, as a cat might bring in a dead bird—look, a bladder, see how much urine a pig can store in itself! It is an inedible friend to the celery root; it exists to make celery root seem more interesting than it really is. In this, it succeeds. My companion looks as if she wants to hide under the table until the bladder is removed by human trolley. The Finger Lakes Duck ("Dry-Aged with Pear, Mushroom, and Duck Jus") is better, even if it has lavender flying out of its bum like a fragrant mauve comet and is now a duck/garden on a plate because a duck by itself—well, that is not good enough. These men didn't make

a billion dollars to eat duck the way other people do.

It is not, to me, food, because it owes more to obsession than to love. It is not, psychologically, nourishing. It is weaponized food, food tortured and contorted beyond what is reasonable; food taken to its illogical conclusion; food not to feed yourself but to thwart other people.

We are, for some reason, invited into the kitchen. It is immensely clean, large, and busy, and motivational words line a wall: COOL; ENDLESS REINVENTION; INSPIRED; FORWARD MOVING; FRESH; COLLABORATIVE; SPONTANEOUS; VIBRANT; ADVENTUROUS; LIGHT; INNOVATIVE. Similar words were written on the walls of the McDonald's in Olympic Park in London in 2012, but I do not

IT IS NOT FOOD, BECAUSE IT OWES MORE TO OBSESSION THAN TO LOVE. IT IS FOOD TAKEN TO ITS ILLOGICAL CONCLUSION

mention this. We stand at a tiny station and watch a woman prepare egg creams. This soothes me—ah, sugar!—and then we return to our table for dessert, which is Maple Bourbon Barrel Aged with Milk and Shaved Ice. It is sugared snow in Manhattan in springtime; it is snow that you eat when you have lost your innocence; it is—what else?—Charles Foster Kane's snow!

Across the river, in Brooklyn, is Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare: "Brooklyn's only three Michelin-starred restaurant." It is attached to a supermarket, also called Brooklyn Fare, which has homilies painted on its windows: FEELING BITTERSWEET? NO NEED TO PUSH! The buzz surrounding this restaurant comes at least in part from the neighborhood at the edge of Downtown Brooklyn. Here, the novelty is the relative poverty of other people and their odd ways: emerge from Chef's Table and fall over a homeless person. This is Brooklyn as theme park.

Chef's Table is, as food journalists—or marketing people posing as food journalists, or food journalists in thrall to marketing people, of whom there are too many—will tell you, hell to get into. I

never really believe it when restaurants say this; there is always a table. But it is the first move in the game: create a yearning for that which others cannot have and you can sell it at any price.

Each Monday morning, at ten-thirty, you—or a person representing you—are invited to telephone for a table six weeks later. "All reservations," says the website, which is the most explicitly controlling—okay, rude—I have yet encountered, "for the sixth week out are booked at that time." You then receive an email that may have been written by a lawyer. It says the kinds of things lawyers say, in the language that lawyers use. It is comprehensive and sadistic, and it does not tell you to have a nice day, not ever. For instance: "We welcome you to enjoy your food free of distractions. We request no pictures or notes be taken." Payment must be made in advance. No sneakers. No vegetarians. No flip-flops. No joy. (I invented the last one.) Because none of this is for us. It is for them. It would have been kinder to say, "We are narcissistic paranoiacs who love tiny little fish and will share them with you for money. We request no pictures or notes be taken."

We are offered a table for ten o'clock on Thursday night. We take it, but the day before the meal, we are told to come at six. The customer is servile to the product. Thus is the power of marketing!

We are seated in an industrial-style, anti-décor room; that is, a kitchen. Kitchens are interesting to people who rarely go in them, riveting even. You enter the restaurant through a series of incomprehensible plastic flaps. Maybe they are homeless-person repellents? You sit down in the kitchen. It has a bright buffed bar and eighteen stools with backs. The emails and marketing literature are effective. The room seethes with angry anticipation; this better be good, after the emails and the trip to Downtown Brooklyn!

There are five chefs and three waiters: one to serve the food, one to arrange the cutlery, one to serve the drinks. We all eat the same food at the same time, but there is no camaraderie between the diners; in fact, we avoid one another, which is preposterous in a room this size. For, at these prices, who would risk marring their experience with an uncontrolled—and uncontrollable—interaction with a stranger who was not

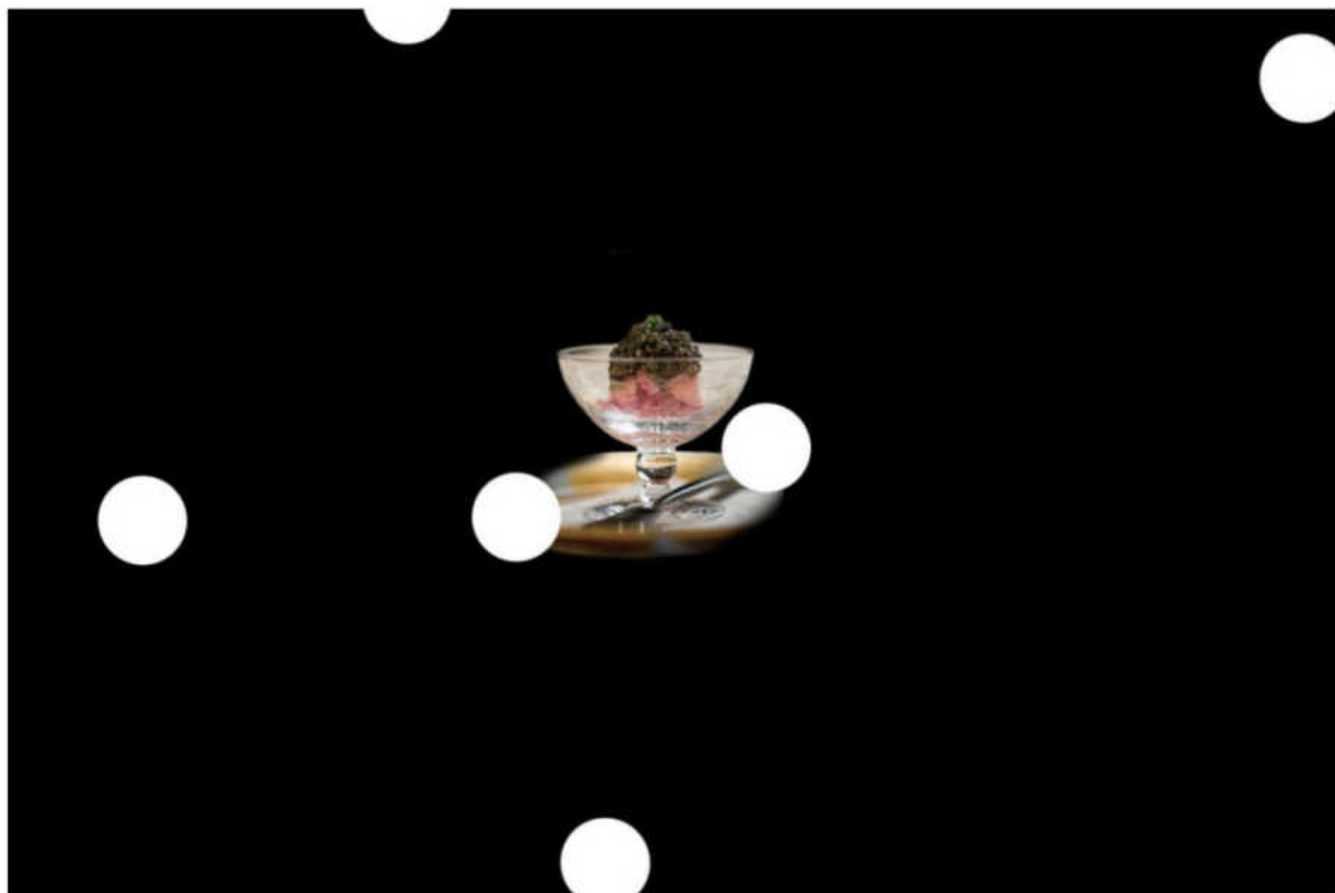
in the business of serving you? I quickly realize that to attempt a noncurated social encounter here would be equivalent to asking a fellow diner for some deviant form of sexual intercourse, or a bite of his squid.

I ask the waiter why I can't take notes or pictures. Can I sketch something? Doodle? Write a play? You cannot separate me from my notebook; if I cannot

decide we hate Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare and we behave badly; in this restaurant, anything other than gormless supplication to the fish is behaving badly. Please tell me just a little more about the salmon? Did it swim on the left- or the right-hand side of the river? Was it educated? Did it have any dreams left? We snigger. We complain that other customers are texting and taking

take notes between courses, as *Service Included* tells us the *New York Times* critic did.) It is fish. It is very good fish delivered with a self-importance that feels very close to aggression, and it is not worth the journey.

As I leave I am partially flayed. A tiny girl has pushed her stool a few feet out from the bar, for reasons I do not understand. Her tiny legs sway in the void.



bear witness to raw fish, what am I? He, a tidy young man in the inevitable suit, says they are afraid of "leaks." These people are mad; why can't I have an international scoop relating to fish and how it looks and what it does and what sauce is doused upon its lifeless flesh? He looks solemn—there are no grins here—but his mouth curls up. He gave me that.

The word "leak" offends us investigative journalists. You cannot leak the details of a piece of fish, you can only report them. But not here. Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare has insulted whistleblowers everywhere; see how the luxury-goods industry steals the language of victimhood and dismembers it for its own ends, rendering it worthless! We

photographs of the fish—they are "leaking"—but not us, you can depend on us. We would never threaten the national security of this kitchen and let the Islamic State in to attack your wasabi. We run through the homeless-person-repellent flaps and smoke cigarettes when we should have waited, like girls for Communion with open mouths and pinkish tongues, for the next be-tified lump.

Between these transgressions, we eat a series of tiny pieces of food, each delivered with its companion essay spoken in an extraordinary monotone, none of which I can relate to you because I am not allowed to take notes. (I am too ashamed to hide in the bathroom to

Perhaps she is admiring them, or trying to eat them? (Still stuck to her, they are fresh enough.) In any case, she does not know how to sit on a stool, which is a basic skill. I try to squeeze past—I am English, after all—and cut myself on a piece of metal sticking out of the wall; maybe it's a thermostat, or a fire alarm. I don't know. I scream; after an evening in this kitchen, it comes naturally. Seventeen faces—fourteen customers and three waiters—turn to me neutrally, perplexed. What is this noise that has disturbed our three-star Michelin kitchen experience (and in Brooklyn too)? Is it a large piece of fish? (Is everybody food now, or if not food then potential food?) I ask the female waiter what maimed me.

"I have to go!" she shouts. She cannot associate with the screamer. The male waiter opens the door with a big, fake, horrifying smile. "Goodbye!" he sings. We exit the flaps. We were not grateful enough, you see; we did not prostrate ourselves before the brand.

Chef's Table wreaked revenge for my ingratitude. Restaurants are systems; systems have weapons. Outside I scribble down what I can remember of the menu. I lie, of course, I write it on my iPhone, because print is dead. And it scrubbed itself as the paper and pencil I was denied would never do, although I could conceivably have left them in a taxi. So I can only say I ate a procession of tiny and exquisite pieces of fish and seafood, including, I think, golden-eye snapper, scallop, lobster, and mackerel; plus something called, mysteriously, "the root" (these may be my words, I am not sure); and a wondrous, sweet green cake that shed green dust on the counter, like a fleeting dream; and that I was flayed, too, and there was blood on my piled-up clothes on the floor of the frightening hotel room in Midtown with the expanse of gray carpet; and that if you want an experience like the one on offer at Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare, then put a dead fish on your kitchen table and punch yourself repeatedly in the face, then write yourself a bill for \$425.29 (including wine). That should do it.

I didn't think it would be possible to get into Masa. Masa is so oversubscribed—according to the P.R. babble—that it has a cheaper satellite restaurant called Bar Masa next door and a further satellite named Kappo Masa, on Madison Avenue, in which George Clooney ate a mere day before our visit, according to the *New York Post*. (In the case of anything Masa, the word "cheaper" is relative.) I don't really care about George Clooney, but I mention this because I think Masa would like it; this is a restaurant franchise that thrives on the thick application of awe.

The Masa mother ship is next to Through Itself at the top of the Mall of Death because Through Itself is not really By Itself. They huddle together for profit, benefiting from cross-marketing; presumably they share copies of *Finesse*. My companion made the booking in her own name. This was, in retrospect, an

error. She was promptly asked by the Masa receptionist: "Are they celebrating anything special that night?" Masa customers do not use telephones; drugged by the strange air of the Manhattan super-restaurant, I begin to think: is it possible they do not have hands?

You pull back the curtain—a real curtain from ceiling to knees, not a metaphorical curtain, and it flaps in your face, gently—and learn that the most famous sushi bar in New York looks like a shed, or a ghostly corner of Walmart. I suppose the awful phrase "the wow factor" had to bring us here eventually; when you can wow no more, go shed. When I see Masa, I understand—I applaud—the dazzling ambition of this confidence trick: two tiny rooms with beige walls and pale floors, some foliage, some rocks, a dismal pool.

The larger room holds the counter of Chef Masayoshi Takayama ("Masa"). It is brightly lit. Masa is usually described as legendary, but I dislike this word; I prefer to call him clever. This Keyser Söze of squid came from Japan to L.A. to New York on a wave of whispers, less for the manufacture of his sushi, I suspect, than for the manufacture of his profit. He has an air of great seriousness and nobility, like a man who has outsmarted life but still knows its gifts are worthless. His eyes are Yoda-wise; his movements are brief and graceful; he is wearing bright blue shoes. I fantasize that he is an actor playing Chef Masayoshi Takayama ("Masa") while the other—the real Chef Masayoshi Takayama ("Masa")—is elsewhere. Maybe there are three of them, one for each restaurant, and more to come, depending on demand. But I let it go. I think he is laughing. Specifically at us. He bows.

The diners sit silently, like well-dressed children taking an exam in self-delusion, which they will pass. Later, some of them will post copies of the bill on TripAdvisor; others, it is rumored, are Nobu employees wearing hidden cameras; if so, they are the world's most ludicrous and well-fed corporate spies.

My companion and I sit in the smaller room. The table, says the waiter, is blond maple wood and surpassingly smooth; it is sanded between every service because each drip leaves a stain. I have never before met a table that thinks it is a tablecloth. There is Japa-

nese writing on the wall. I ask the waiter: "What does it mean, this writing?" "No one knows," he says quietly. "It is in a dialect so obscure it cannot be translated." It is literally incomprehensible.

The arrangement of dishes is complex. I draw a diagram and look at it many times, but I still do not understand. It is as impenetrable to me as the wilder shores of Republicanism. On these dishes are tiny pieces of fatty tuna, fluke, sea bream, deep-sea snapper, squid, needlefish, seawater eel, freshwater eel. I know that it is sushi—good sushi—and rare, rich Ohmi beef, but no flesh can live up to the idea of Masa, even if it died in the act of trying.

Chef Masa comes to emit wisdom, but I miss it. I am sitting on the toilet in a room that looks like a hovel made of rock, or the set of the last act of the *Lord of the Rings*. (After the shed, witness the cave!) My companion relates: he came over; he shook her hand and nodded with all courtesy; the waiter asked, as if bearing some dazzling gift, "Do you want a photograph with Chef Masa?" Being of strong mind, and immune to even the more powerful narcotics that Public Relations can deliver, she declined. But she thanked him (for what, she still cannot say); and he was borne away on the golden winds of commerce, presumably to Kappo Masa and George Clooney's mouth. The bill was \$1,706.26.

As we leave, I walk to the sushi shrine for one last gawp. What is its meaning? A waiter is watching me. I move; he moves. I stop; he stops. He does not want to obscure my view; he is, so shamefully, my pliant shadow.

So this is where the money ends; this is where it flows; this is what it is for. To a fake shed with a toilet-cave and a narcissistic airport lounge on the fourth floor of a shopping mall in New York City that has risen in the early twenty-first century to service a clientele so immune to joy that they seek, rather, sadism and an overwrought, miniaturized cuisine. For when you can go anywhere, as the crew of the *Flying Dutchman* knew, everywhere looks the same; and so the quest for innovation goes on. This quest is neurotic, even in Manhattan, an island built high to compensate for its isolation and its limitations; an island shaped like a neurosis. Happy eating. ■

NEW BOOKS

By Christine Smallwood



It starts with a mistake; most stories do. Ex-model Luz and her ex-military boyfriend, Ray, are squatting in a dusty mansion in what used to be Laurel Canyon but is now, after a California drought of apocalyptic proportions, only “some ruined heaven.” Luz has been famous since birth as Baby Dunn, “conservation’s golden child,” the innocent whose age measures the number of years gone by without swimming pools and avocados. She’s busy trying on the clothes the mansion’s owner left behind when a prairie dog surprises her on the stairs and, unthinking, she kicks the rodent into the library. Her alarm at this wiggling sign of life brings to mind Beck-

ett’s Hamm, who despaired at the sight of a flea: “But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!”

Ray puts the creature out of its misery, but it’s not that easy to prevent humanity from starting again. Down at the rain dance, the get-together of freaks who have refused to board the buses east, Luz and Ray spy a child toddling after a band of cretins and molesters; horrified, they steal her. Now they’re a family, and it’s time to leave town. They point their classic Karmann Ghia in

the direction of the encroaching Amargosa sand dune in search of what, they have heard, is a colony. The car is green, the ground is brown. “Amargosa,” from *amargo*: “bitter.”

GOLD FAME CITRUS (Riverhead, \$27.95, riverheadbooks.com), Claire Vaye Watkins’s excellent new novel, follows Luz, Ray, and the baby they name Estrella from ecological waste into psychic quicksand. You will have noticed that their names are variations on a theme: identity is shifty like that in this book. Thirst has made life brittle. Yucca trees hollowed by the sun can be knocked over with a single swipe. The sand sea (“a vast tooth-colored superdune in the forgotten crook of the wasted West”) doesn’t cover things up, exactly; it crushes them, like a glacier or a rock. Watkins’s narrative voice is mythic and speculative, its sediment forming and re-forming in lists, treatises, reports. The writing, with its tough sentimentality, is reminiscent of Denis Johnson’s, but Watkins has a style of mordant observation all her own. “He was doing penance for the AWOL thing,” Luz thinks when they run out of gas and Ray, ever the deserter, says goodbye. “He was going to leave her alone to watch their child die, to prove what a good man he was.” Luz and the baby fall in with the colony, which is led by an expert dowser and spiritual creep named Levi, the author of a field guide to the Amargosa’s unusual flora and fauna. Levi bestows special favor on Luz. She has visions.

How did all of this happen? Or, to quote *Mad Max: Fury Road*—Who destroyed the world?



Who had latticed the Southwest with a network of aqueducts?... Who had diverted the coast’s rainwater and sapped the Great Basin of its groundwater?... If this was God he went by new names: Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, City of San Diego,

City of Phoenix, Arizona Water and Power, New Mexico Water Commission, Las Vegas Housing and Water

Authority, Bureau of Land Management, United States Department of the Interior.

Watkins knows that bureaucracy is another name for destiny, but *Gold Fame Citrus* is not a political thriller. Luz carries a copy of John Muir everywhere she goes, and the spirit of the Romantic sublime—of human incapacity and omnipotent terrain—is on every page. The Amargosa works like the death drive, exerting a magnetic pull on certain people, who feel themselves called to the desert—summoned, they say. It also works like God, rejecting the unfit from its dry paradise, expatriating them to civilization. “These decisions had been made before this discussion,” Luz thinks near the end of the novel, “before the prairie dog crossed their threshold.” We find out who Levi really is, but not all forces of nature are demystified: not the sea, where Luz’s mother drowned years ago; not erotic attraction, which Luz compares to telepathy (“the wild luck of two people feeling the exact same thing at the exact same time”); not the stirrings of maternal feeling for little Estrella.

Is Luz a good mother? She tries. But we inherit the world our progenitors made, just as we inherit their ways of making it. “You spend your life thinking you’re an original,” Luz says. “Then one day you realize you’ve been acting just like your parents.” That this statement can plausibly endure when water has turned to salt is both terrifying and strangely soothing. I suppose it all depends on who your parents are. Watkins’s father is a former member of the Manson Family.

Readers of Jay Nordlinger’s *CHILDREN OF MONSTERS* (Encounter Books, \$25.99, encounterbooks.com), a sketchy treatment of the children of twenty twentieth-century dictators, might find themselves concluding that unhappy families are more alike than is commonly asserted. But perhaps that only represents the view from outside the garden gates. Even in the age of the Internet there are mysteries that research cannot penetrate. Franco and

Pol Pot had one daughter each; Hitler may have had a son. But how many children did Idi Amin have? Sixty? As for what it all means, Nordlinger, whose favorite analytic category is “evil,” can’t say.

Being a dictator’s child seems a bit like being the child of any rich workaholic—nanny, boarding school, travel and/or exile. Many have earned advanced degrees, becoming engineers, scientists, or professors; a few have actually written their own dissertations. Valentin Ceaușescu and



Uday Hussein both oversaw soccer organizations; Saadi Qaddafi captained the national squad. (Antonio Castro, a surgeon, was the Cuban baseball team’s doctor.) Maher al-Assad took charge of the military. A handful of sons (alleged rapists and torturers Uday Hussein, Vasily Stalin, and Nicu Ceaușescu) are outright villains. Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, Bashar al-Assad, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un inherited the family business, though the smart and politically savvy daughters—Marie-Denise Duvalier, Bushra al-Assad, and Kim Sul-song—were denied succession. Reunions can be tense affairs, particularly when daughters have chosen objectionable husbands; Mussolini and Saddam both had sons-in-law killed. Mao, who had ten children, didn’t see them more than a few times a year. He may have sent one of his daughters to a reeducation camp.

Nordlinger has sympathy for the dissenters: Jaffar Amin, who describes himself as a “social democrat on the Norwegian model” and has pushed for a truth and reconciliation commission in Uganda; Hussein Khomeini, who would not be opposed to an American invasion of Iran; and the daughters of Stalin and Fidel Castro,

both of whom defected to the United States. Incidentally, Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana, was an avid reader of *National Review*, where Nordlinger is a senior editor. (Even so, she does not receive a free pass. Her remarks on the similarities between the United States and the U.S.S.R. are in line with “any number of professors on American campuses.”)

Not that everything is Father’s fault. Neither Jiang Qing, Mao’s fourth wife, nor Svetlana’s mother, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, was “maternal.” (Nordlinger: “We might pause to imagine a household in which Stalin is the more loving parent.”) But how *should* a woman be? Carmen Franco and Raghda Hussein are tsked for having plastic surgery, while the twin sisters Mobutu took as wife and mistress “grew plump with time.” Saddam’s second wife, Samira, was a “femme fatale.” Albania’s Ermal Hoxha married a “hot tamale.”

Hannah Arendt said that natality, “the new beginning inherent in birth,” is “the miracle that saves the world.” But people are born into families, and all parents are, for a few years, anyway, totalitarians who wield the ultimate dictatorial power: the power to shape reality. Every child thinks her family is normal until she starts receiving news of how they live next door. Laws, rights, and status are not universal. Procedures vary. Regime change can be traumatic, whether the path is one of revolution or reform. Nordlinger characterizes his project as, “in part, a psychological study, I suppose,” though it reads more like a collection of Wikipedia entries. The real question to ask about families is this: are they doomed to reproduce their own small fascisms, training the younger subjects to desire absolute power over others? Or can they—somehow—rear individuals capable of truly democratic relations?

It is truly democratic relations that will be required, Jedediah Purdy writes in *AFTER NATURE: A POLITICS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE* (Harvard University Press, \$29.95, hup.harvard.edu), to address our age of “permanent crises”: loss of species and

habitats, resource depletion, drought. The Anthropocene, the name lately given to this era in which nature cannot be said to exist untouched by human intervention—an era variously dated to the nuclear bomb, the Industrial Revolution, and the dawn of agriculture—has been a topic for scientific inquiry, moral piety, and existential despair; in June, Pope Francis made it a matter of spiritual urgency. But for Purdy, a law professor at Duke, paradigmatic Anthropocene issues like climate change, food, and animal welfare are political problems. This does not mean that political solutions are readily forthcoming.

Real environmental reform is a matter of political economy. That is, it requires engaging the foundations of economic life: what kind of wealth an economy produces, how it distributes that wealth, what kind of freedom and equality it promotes, and what provision it makes for the future. These are political questions whose answers must be worked out through economic institutions. But the politics of modern democracies has become less able to engage such questions, even as the questions have become harder and more urgent.

There is, nonetheless, no alternative to politics. “The democratic responsibility,” Purdy writes, “is the responsibility of making a world.” Anthropocene thinking teaches that the environment is not something to save but something that we will change and change again. An Anthropocene politics is one that acts on behalf of unborn generations. It asks the living to be the miracle that saves the world.

After Nature explains four kinds of “environmental imagination” that have shaped the concept of nature in American law and experience; their thrust has been quarry and quarantine. The settlers who “cleared” the West were moved by a providential vision; John Muir and the Sierra Club represent the Romantic imagination; Progressive Era conservationists brought utilitarian thinking to the administration and management of parks; and writers like Rachel Carson developed an ecological imagination, in which nature was understood as a

system of interdependent parts. Every image of nature has its corresponding economic and political system. The settlers, for example, called for the land to be tilled and developed, which required the expulsion of Native Americans, while the technocratic values of the Progressive reformers were perfect for a consumer society of vacationers who wanted to be back in the office on Monday morning.

Muir’s notion of “wilderness” is key. (In his pursuit of it, Muir turned Thoreau—for whom, Purdy writes, “profanation is simply the condition of the world”—into an intellectual ally, someone looking for a temporary escape from society, when the point of *Walden* was in fact to transform society.) Wilderness thinking imagined nature as something set aside for restorative solitude, and environmentalism thus set itself apart from work, apart from ugliness—apart from people. The Sierra Club made possible the maintenance and preservation of thousands of acres of pristine land. But when the high mountain landscape becomes sacred, Purdy writes, ordinary places “are treated as industrial reserves.” The contemporary food movement, to its credit, moves away from this kind of thinking. It marries an ecological mindset, which grasps nature as a holistic system, to the settler mentality that dignified work.

“Look at that lizard,” my husband said to me recently, as we enjoyed a scenic vista courtesy of Teddy Roosevelt and the National Park System. “Once his kind ruled the earth.” The fantasy of our coming extinction so often exudes a pleasant, lotus-eating inevitability. False prophets, or mass-murdering dictators, or garden-variety pain and suffering are invoked to win the case against humanity. Maybe it will be better when we’re gone, a voice of comfortable melancholy says; maybe that’s what we deserve. There’s that flea, beating his fragile wings. Catch him—quick!—before it all starts up again. *After Nature* argues that we will deserve the future only because it will be the one we made. We will live, or die, by our mistakes. ■



THE SIXTIES: RECOLLECTIONS OF THE DECADE FROM HARPER'S MAGAZINE Introduction by Eugene J. McCarthy

Relive the decade that changed our lives—Vietnam, Oswald, Cassius Clay, Castro's Cuba, civil rights, pot, the 1968 election . . .

From a heart-wrenching war that tore America apart to the political turmoil that destroyed our illusions of innocence. From the music and art that made us think and feel in new ways to the activism and experimentation that changed American society forever. *The Sixties* reviews that decade of change, focusing on politics, the civil rights movement, youth culture, and much more from the unique and far-sighted perspective of the nation's oldest monthly magazine. It includes profiles, interviews, commentaries, and essays by some of the best writers of the '60s era, including **George Plimpton, Walker Percy, Joe McGinnis, David Halberstam, Richard Hofstadter, C. Vann Woodward, Priscilla Johnson McMillan, Sara Davidson, and Louis Lomax.** Introduction by **Senator Eugene J. McCarthy**, presidential peace candidate of 1968.

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Published by Franklin Square Press
ISBN 1-879957-20-5
Softcover \$14.95

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NEW TELEVISION

By Rivka Galchen



In Season 5 of *LOUIE* (FX), Louie is a new kind of superhero. Like Wonder Woman, the canonical superhero he most resembles, Louie's distinctive superpower is love. With loving understanding, he transforms his sister's aggressive, gun-wielding ex-boyfriend into a gentle, giggling man who learns to knit. With loving understanding, he relieves the sexual loneliness of a pregnant surrogate mother and, in doing so, hastens new life into the world. This enrages the (nearly evil) nonpregnant parents, who had a detailed birth plan. "Some things don't work out the way you planned them," Louie says to them as he exits the hospital, fleeing their aspersions and our cheers.

And he is fleeing our cheers. Louie repeatedly attempts to correct the cosmic imbalance of things going so very right for him—as they have for Louis CK, the comedian and creator of the highly autobiographical and much-celebrated show—and so very wrong for pretty much the rest of the world. Louie seeks out rejection so that he can be himself.

The fourth episode of Season 5 begins with Louie's brother, Bobby, calling to say that their uncle has died—which turns out not to be the case; the obituary was for another man with the same name. After the brothers attend the other man's funeral, Bobby says he wants to share something important. Louie discour-

ages him, but Bobby goes ahead. Bobby says that he is truly happy to see his brother's success: "You got a beautiful wife, you got a divorce, you get part-time custody of two beautiful kids. Me, I got nothing. No money, no skills, no Twitter." The overhead lights in Bobby's apartment are on an electricity-saving timer, and at this point they promptly go out.

These scenes constitute just the first seven minutes of the episode. After that, Louie gets beaten up by a woman on the street while trying to stop a fight; his daughters laugh at him for being beaten up by a woman; his friend and love interest, Pamela, also laughs at him; and then, when he asks her for help covering his bruises with makeup so he can do that night's comedy show, she convinces him to put on lipstick and have sex with their gender roles switched. When Louie later suggests that perhaps their relationship has reached a new level, Pamela breaks up with him. He's great, she says, but she can't give him what he needs and deserves. The last twenty seconds of the episode show Louie and Bobby at a diner, with Bobby laughing joyfully, presumably at Louie's degradations.

Bobby's joy is where the logic of the episode, and in some sense of the whole season, is clearest. Part of Louie's superpower of love is his ability to occupy a position of humiliation and dejection, as if this might protect those around him from the same fate. Bobby's laughter isn't cruel, because we sense how relieved Louie is to have his debasement to offer to a brother he loves. Louie, for all his success, can't give Bobby looks, charisma, or a career—"Tell me what you want," Louie says; Bobby replies, "You're throwing it in my face, right in my face"—but he can give him a moment of true humor and happiness.

Louie's very presence precipitates expressions of weakness and longing. In one episode, he has nightmares—a gooey shirtless man pursues him, then he's onstage naked from the waist down and unable to speak—that recur until a friend asks him to think about what happened just before the dreams began. Louie remembers that he'd failed to help a

woman in need: the mother of a friend of his daughter's asked for help moving a large fish tank, but Louie refused. When she started crying, Louie said, "I don't really know you. So I feel like this is a private thing." He then placed a blanket over her head, and left. Near the end of the episode, we see Louie arrive at her apartment with a bucket and a net.

The show returns again and again to moments when Louie the superhero is unfairly expected to save the day. On tour in Cincinnati, he rides with a driver who is chatty, socially and emotionally needy, and unresponsive to Louie's cues about wanting to sit quietly. "I hope I'm not being rude," Louie finally says. "I just don't feel like talking." He is too sensitive not to notice that the man, who keeps bringing up how friendly other visiting comedians were, wants to hang out. Louie tells him, "I'm forty-seven years old, I've been doing this for I don't even know how long anymore. . . . So for me, now, the road, it's not like an adventure. It's like going to the toilet; it's something I have to do. I don't have a lot of choices out here, but one choice that I need to be able to make is that I can be by myself and not talk to everybody. And I don't mean that to be insulting or unfriendly, that's just what I need. . . . So I'm sorry if that's a bummer for you, or if it's disappointing. But it's what works for me." The driver cries. In the airport on the way to the next stop on his tour, Louie tries to help a lost Muslim girl, but she runs away before he can reunite her with her family.

Louie is ill at ease with his superpowers and nostalgic for his secret identity as an ordinary man, a disappointment. In the final episode of the season, he plays a weeklong run in Oklahoma City. Here he almost finds the hell he needs. He doesn't like the club's owner, the audience, or the comedian he is paired with, and they don't like him. Oklahoma, apparently, is beyond even Louie's capacities for love, and when he tries to make a connection with the other comedian—they agree that fart jokes are funny and try to bond over a bottle of whiskey—the man ends up dying from a drunken fall.

Louie did not begin as a superhero show. (To be clear, I don't think Louis CK or anyone else describes the show in those terms.) The early seasons focused on fatherhood, with Louie acting in what we traditionally think of as a motherly, domestic role—associating gracefully with other parents, picking his kids up from school, preparing meals. (There is of course a latent superhero aspect there as well.) In Season 4, Louie punches someone for the first time—she's the beautiful, wealthy daughter of an astronaut—but the punch is an accident.

The fantasy sequences in those early episodes provided a kind of premonition of the heroics to come: one shows him on a subway car with a brown liquid sloshing in one of the seats; Louie takes off his shirt to absorb the filth, and his fellow riders celebrate. These sequences often contained the show's most brilliant moments. He hears garbagemen outside his apartment banging cans as he is sleeping, and then they are climbing through his window and jumping on his bed. He decides to avoid a visit to his father by stealing a motorcycle, riding to the ocean, hopping on a boat, and heading toward the horizon. He spends Christmas sharing a meal with some peasants in rural China.

The one fully positive experience Louie has in Oklahoma is also a fantasy, and it ends the season. He attends a fair in a rainy parking lot and enters a tent where Civil War-style photographs are staged. After two women ask for his help—everyone is always asking for his help—he dresses up as a general and takes a picture with them. He treats them courteously and dances with them, and when he finally returns home to New York, he puts the photograph on the refrigerator. He explains to his daughter that the man in the photo is his great-great-great-great-grandfather—"His name was Bash, Bush, Blackbottom, uh, Bottompit. Blackbottom Pit"—a great soldier who was killed by snakes.

Part of the perfection of this closing is that the daughter seems to know that her father is telling her a fantasy, but still wants to hear more. "He shot the last shot of the Civil War and he missed. So they just quit. That's why they quit the war, because it was such a bad shot. But then he went home and his wife had

been eaten by a snake, so he killed the snake that ate his wife," Louie says.

His daughter says, "Wait, I thought he was killed by the snake."

"Yes. A whole other snake. Totally unrelated snake. About a week later. On a Wednesday. The snake ate him."

"Wow," she says. "What else?"

I watched Season 5 of *Louie* in a series of 6:30 A.M. viewings with my twenty-two-month-old daughter. She doesn't speak much, and while I recognize that I should be concerned about "screen time," I wanted to watch, and she wanted to watch, and, naturally, she drew my attention to aspects of the show that I had been missing. She dwelled on Louie's mortal traits, not his superpowers. Three words in particular caught her attention, all of them from the opening credits. "Louie?" she would say hopefully each morning. Then, "Pizza?"—a reference to the slice he eats after ascending the West Fourth Street subway stairs. Finally she would say, without fail, "Die?" Which, I had never noticed before, is the last word of the theme song, as in "Louie, Louie, you're gonna—" ■

September Index Sources

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THE PRISONER OF SEX

Franzen and the women

By Elaine Blair

Discussed in this essay:

Purity, by Jonathan Franzen. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 576 pages. \$28.
fsgbooks.com.

Purity Tyler, Pip to her friends, is a recent Berkeley graduate with \$130,000 in student debt. Raised by a socially isolated single mother who works as a checkout clerk in a grocery store, Pip has no connections or mentors, only a vague notion of “doing good in the world” and the ambition “not to end up like her mother.” She’s a squatter in a makeshift household of activists and Occupy sympathizers in Oakland. She barely ekes out a living at a Bay Area startup, a shady operation that “bundles” and “brokers” clean-energy systems for suburban communities in exchange for a large cut of the tax-incentive payments.

Nobody had warned her that the figure to pay attention to when she was being interviewed by Igor, the head of consumer outreach at Renewable Solutions, was not the “thirty or forty thousand dollars” in commissions that he foresaw her earning in her very first year but the \$21,000 base salary he was offering, or that a salesman as persuasive as Igor might also be skilled at selling shit jobs to unsuspecting twenty-one-year-olds.

Pip could use some guidance, and also some money. Faced with the hard work of making a life for herself under these not horrible but not terribly promising conditions, Pip wishes she had an exit strategy. Somewhere, she has a father whose identity her mother has always refused to reveal. Maybe he has money. Maybe he can pay off her debt.

Many in Pip’s position would daydream in just this way. Fortunately for her, she is a character at the beginning of a novel, and it’s not the kind of novel that chronicles ordi-

nary daily life. One evening, a representative of the Sunlight Project, an international organization devoted to leaking classified information in the manner of WikiLeaks, gets in touch. The representative suggests that Pip apply for a paid internship, pointing out that the organization has an expert team of hackers and researchers who can help Pip find her father. Soon the famous founder of the Sunlight Project, a former East Berliner called Andreas Wolf, is personally exchanging emails with Pip, urging her aboard. Pip is suspicious, but the offer is too intriguing, the money too good, and Andreas’s attentions too flattering to refuse. His unexpected summons offers “the thrill of imagining that she really was an extraordinary person, and that this was the true reason her life was such a mess.”

Some important things happen to Pip while she’s in Bolivia, and then in Denver, and then back home in the Bay Area. Pip’s mother had feared that Andreas was luring her daughter to South America for sex. In one of the novel’s many ironic twists, he turns out to be using her for other things; when it comes to sex, Pip uses him. But the larger surprise is that Pip, unlike her namesake in *Great Expectations*, proves not to be the center of the novel. She is being manipulated by Andreas in his attempt to get close to another man, an American journalist named Tom Aberant. The stories of these two men, both old enough to be Pip’s father, form the heart of Jonathan Franzen’s *Purity*.

Tom is the founder and editor of the *Denver Independent*, an online-only newspaper. He has led the life

of an ordinary middle-class professional, with two exceptions. On a trip to Germany as a young man, he played a minor role in helping to cover up a murder that Andreas committed. Some twenty years later, after becoming a world-renowned leaker, Andreas develops an obsession with Tom, ostensibly because he’s worried that Tom will give away his secret but really because he is a lonely megalomaniac who has sort of platonically fallen in love with Tom; he has perceived in Tom a strong moral compass that he himself lacks, and desperately seeks his approval.

But how to get Tom’s attention? After some digging, Andreas uncovers the second unusual thing about Tom: he has a daughter he doesn’t know about. The daughter, of course, is Pip. After luring her to Bolivia, Andreas arranges for her to get a job at the *Denver Independent*, at which point she is spontaneously befriended by Tom and his girlfriend, Leila. Tom eventually discovers Pip’s identity and, through several more plot loops, is led into a dramatic confrontation with Andreas. The Tom-Andreas relationship is reminiscent of the conflict between nice Walter Berglund and bad boy Richard Katz in *Freedom*, but it transpires in a very different key. The actual contact between the two men is brief, their thirty-year-old cover-up turns out to have geopolitical implications in the present, and their final scene together involves literally cliff-hanging suspense.

This may sound complicated enough, but it’s only a sketch of the action. *Purity*’s plot is a beautiful arabesque. It reaches back from the present day to the 1950s, moves between three continents, and involves murder, rape, family secrets, duplicitous mothers, and several missing fathers. Subplots are doubled and trebled. But the remarkable thing is that the novel does not seem convoluted when you’re reading it; to an astonishing degree, the melodramatic swoops of the plot are well orchestrated and thrilling.

As usual, Franzen unspools the story from several points of view: Pip, Andreas, Tom, and Leila each get at

Elaine Blair lives in Los Angeles.



least one section of the book, and each section takes us deep into that character's past. The son of Communist Party insiders, Andreas became politically disillusioned as an adolescent in the 1970s, after a personal crisis. When he was fourteen he noticed "a gaunt and bearded figure in a ratty sheepskin jacket" watching him play soccer after school. The bum appeared every evening at the same time for a week until Andreas gave in to curiosity and approached him. The bum told him that he was Andreas's real father, and that he'd had an affair with Andreas's mother, Katya. Katya's husband, the man Andreas thought was his father, had avenged the affair by having his wife's lover arrested as an enemy of the G.D.R. The facts checked out. Andreas's mother had been lying to him, and the lie cast a new light on

her talk about the greatness of the socialist republic.

Katya is a high-relief villainess, guilty of selfish mothering, adultery, vanity, deceit, and complicity with a corrupt political regime. After finding out about the one affair, Andreas suddenly recalls that there were others, and that Katya had even shown him her genitals on two occasions during his childhood. Was it abuse? Exhibitionism? Manic hypersexuality? The novel offers no diagnosis. Andreas, in any case, resents his mother's libidinal activities. Though he doesn't really care about politics, he begins a new life as a political dissident—to spite his mother and, relatedly, to meet girls.

During his university years, Andreas gets in trouble for publishing a dirty poem that is addressed to his mother and his motherland, which

contains an acrostic that reads, "I dedicate the most glorious ejaculation to your socialism." He's sent to live in a church basement with ineffectual fellow dissidents and counsel at-risk youth. The ironies of this punishment are not lost on Andreas.

Had any East German child ever been more privileged and less at risk than he? Yet here he was, in the basement of the rectory, in group sessions and private meetings, counseling teenagers on how to overcome promiscuity and alcohol dependency and domestic dysfunction and assume more productive positions in a society he despised. And he was good at what he did ... and so he was himself, ironically, a productive member of that society.

It's in his capacity as a youth counselor that he meets a beautiful teenager named Annagret, on whose behalf he will commit murder. As Franzen leads Andreas to the crime that holds the plot of *Purity* together, he strains at the outer limits of psychological realism. He calls in literary antecedents for support. This chapter of the book is dense in literary reference and allusion. Hamlet, Lear, and Oedipus are named; Milan Kundera and David Foster Wallace are evoked.

None of this can stop Andreas's story from seeming schematic and overdetermined. It feels as though Franzen has arrived at the details of Andreas's biography by working backward through some faulty process of induction. Why would a man want to leak classified documents on the Internet? Because he hates the idea of official secrets. Why? Because he has committed a secret crime of his own. What kind? Murder. Why'd he do it? To help a pretty girl. *What?* She is being molested by her stepfather, which upsets Andreas because the truth is that he likes sex with teenage girls, too, but he's not comfortable with that part of himself, and so he feels a homicidal rage toward the stepfather. Still—an actual murder? He's megalomaniacal with suicidal tendencies! How did he get that way? He had a really bad mom.

That a former citizen of East Germany who saw the Communist bureaucracy up close might be taken with the ideal of total transparency

wouldn't seem to need quite so elaborate an explanation, but the exigencies of the plot, combined with Franzen's own inclinations as a novelist, push *Purity* relentlessly toward psychosexual motives. So much so that, along the way, the novel ends up making a hash of potentially interesting questions about the possibility of political commitment in the Eastern Bloc, or about the morality of leaking.

Compared with *The Corrections* and *Freedom*, *Purity* rarely feels like it's nailing some aspect of our current cultural conditions. The novel seems to have all the right settings and character types: a houseful of Occupy squatters, a Silicon Valley startup, a notorious leaker and his staff of hackers, a newsroom of an Internet-only journalism outlet, plus historical sections featuring second-wave feminists and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Franzen shrewdly translates nineteenth-century plot elements—radical political actors, gross income inequalities, absent biological parents—into present-day terms. But the melodrama of the high-stakes personal relationships ends up undercutting any real sense of the cultural and political forces at work in American life. In other words, it's hard to think seriously about leaking and journalism when this particular leaker is a deranged murderer and this particular journalist might accidentally hook up with his own daughter.

Speaking of which, *Purity* has a pointedly oedipal plot. Franzen plays with the possibility of unwitting incest when Pip briefly comes to stay at Tom and Leila's house. Pip, who is just getting over an earlier crush on a different middle-aged man, feels "a little bit in love" with Tom. Leila becomes intensely jealous, and Pip notices that Tom is "suddenly uncomfortable around her." Is Tom attracted to Pip, too? By this time, readers already know what Pip doesn't: Tom's discomfort and his close scrutiny of Pip have nothing to do with attraction. He has come to suspect that Pip is his daughter. Though Franzen quickly defuses the threat of incest, his novel abounds with instances of sex be-

tween older men and much younger women (all of them consensual except for the case of Annagret and her stepfather). But what do such relationships mean to us in the absence of incest or abuse? What sort of danger—to the characters, to the kingdom—is posed by the wrong kind of coupling?

The emotional core of the novel is Tom's section, which comes in the form of an unpublished memoir that he wrote years ago in order to maintain his sanity at the end of his twelve-year marriage to Anabel, the woman who would eventually become Pip's mother. *Freedom*, too, had a memoir-within-a-novel conceit. Some critics charged that the sections of that novel supposedly written by Patty, a sardonic, unhappy housewife, were implausible, too obviously the work of an experienced novelist. Tom, by contrast, is a writer by profession, but his account is more credibly the work of an amateur memoirist in one respect. He is still mad at his wife, and we can feel it: the memoir has a strong whiff of grievance.

Tom met Anabel in college. A good boy who was highly susceptible to guilt, he had been chastened as a teenager by his liberal father for looking at a porn magazine ("Simply by owning it you've materially participated in the degradation of a fellow human being") and then chastened all over again by campus feminists. "I felt as if I was up against a structural unfairness; as if simply being male, excitable by pictures through no choice of my own, placed me ineluctably in the wrong. I meant no harm and yet I harmed."

Bearing this load of guilt—or is it victimhood?—he meets Anabel, an artist, feminist, and vegetarian, and the heiress to a billion-dollar fortune. More intellectually sophisticated and sexually experienced than Tom but also thin-skinned and depressive, she exerts an erotic and emotional hold on him. She leans on his sense of guilt to drive a wedge between him and his mother, makes him feel bad about his journalistic accomplishments when her own career stalls, and even persuades him to pee sitting down, in

the name of gender equality. "I have to sit down," she argues, "why shouldn't you sit down? I can't not see where you splatter, and every time I see it I think how unfair it is to be a woman."

As we absorb Tom and Anabel's story, it becomes clear that *Purity* not only has a Pip, it has a sort of Miss Havisham as well. Tom is the one who finally ends their marriage, much against Anabel's wishes, years after their relationship has soured. Anabel, now in her late thirties, takes her revenge by persuading Tom to have unprotected sex, and then going into hiding to keep the resulting pregnancy a secret. Like Miss Havisham, Anabel effectively falls out of time, severing all her social ties, taking on an assumed name, and raising a child in obscurity. Notably, however, Anabel's bitterness over her female condition, unlike Miss Havisham's, *precedes* being spurned by Tom. It is inextricable from her feminism.

Anabel vanishes partly to keep Pip's existence a secret from Tom but also for another reason: she considers her family's fortune morally tainted and doesn't want it to pass into her hands when her father dies. She even rejects the idea of possessing it long enough to give it away as charity. Anabel is the character who most ardently pursues an ideal of purity: no money, no meat, no sex (she remains abstinent after her marriage), no Internet presence. She raises Pip—Purity—lovingly, but she denies the girl knowledge of her father as well as many creature comforts they might have had. And of course she harms Tom, conceiving his child without his permission and then denying him knowledge of his daughter. There are shades of Merry, the terrorist daughter in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, in Franzen's portrait of Anabel. In her quest for moral purity, Anabel is guilty of monstrous wrongs.

Anabel also has a peculiar sexual condition. "She could only achieve satisfaction in the three days when the moon was fullest, no matter how hard she tried on other days of the month." On her three good days, however, she is "a total pleasure ma-

chine." Yes, it's true: Anabel seems to go into heat.

In recent years, Franzen has had what the *New York Daily News* has called a "female problem." He's been under scrutiny for something between outright sexism and a kind of literary elitism that slights female audiences and genres. It began in 2001, with his public hesitations about being an Oprah's Book Club pick. His skepticism of popular television and Oprah's "corporate ownership" read to some as a snub of Oprah's female audience. More recently, the rapturous critical reception of *Freedom* was an occasion for some writers and readers—most prominently the novelists Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Weiner—to raise questions about double standards in literary publishing and reviewing. Franzen's response, which included accusing Weiner of "freeloading on the legitimate problem of gender bias in the canon ... to promote herself," earned him a volley of derisive personal attacks from her. They also made him an enemy of the feminist blog *Jezebel*, which has kept his name in regular circulation as the preeminent example of male authorial pomposity.

I am all for discussions of gender bias when it comes to literary prestige; it's a prejudice that can be devilishly subtle but nonetheless real. I also can't clear Franzen of every charge of possible bias in his writing and public statements. But it has long seemed to me preposterous to single out Franzen, of all male novelists, for these accusations. Not only are *The Corrections* and *Freedom* extraordinarily good novels, they are books in which Franzen distinguishes himself by writing brilliantly about male sexual anxiety without allowing it to curdle his depiction of women. The women in those two novels are as intelligent and as foolish as the men, and the latter category is the crucial one: it's by their foolish ardor that we know Franzen's characters. Their indignity and shame and poor choices break them open to us, make them real and recognizable. Patty and Denise (one of the three adult children of the Lambert family in *The*



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SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST PUZZLE

NOTES FOR "RECONCILED":

Note: * indicates an anagram.

BACK, "together" with the unclued entries, creates common words: BACKPACKER, BACKPEDALS, etc.

	B	A	C	K	T	O	G	E	T	H	E	R	
A	R	N	O	N	E	V	A	N	O	A	M	I	L
P	E	A	C	H	A	E	M	I	R	N	P	L	A
P	A	C	K	E	R	R	M	P	E	D	A	L	S
S	K	R	A	E	D	D	O	O	A	E	N	E	H
D	I	E	T	P	E	R	N	O	D	D	A	T	E
O	N	O	O	F	M	E	B	L	O	N	D	E	S
I	G	N	O	R	E	S	S	B	R	I	A	R	S
S	K	I	S	U	S	S	T	A	B	B	I	N	G
T	A	L	K	I	N	G	R	E	V	I	V	A	L
R	O	I	S	T	E	R	E	R	F	T	O	L	A
O	L	L	A	I	R	A	T	T	A	I	L	E	D
K	I	T	T	E	N	S	C	O	U	N	T	R	Y
E	N	S	T	R	A	P	H	A	N	G	E	R	S

ACROSS: 11. Arno-n; 12. rev.; 13. rev.; 15. *; 16. rev.; 19. hidden, rev.; 22. *; 23. *; 25. pun; 27. b(Lond[on])es[t]; 28. *; 30. br-iars*; 31. ski[p]s; 39. r(E-V)ival*; 41. *; 43. d(olla)r; 44. *; 45. kit(ten)s; 47. strap(rev.)-hangers.

DOWN: 2. *; 3. cock-at-0-os(rev.); 4. two mngs.; 5. hidden; 7. to-read-or; 9. Em-pa-nada; 10. [d]rill; 11. homophone; 18. rev.; 20. *; 21. hidden; 26. fr(U-it)ier; 30. homophone; 32. *; 35. G-lady's; 37. *; 38. G-rasp; 40. vol(t)e; 42. fa(U)n.

Corrections) are denied no measure of folly—and there are, unfortunately, not all that many female fools in literature.

And so it is disappointing that parts of *Purity* read as though Franzen urgently wanted to telegraph a message to anyone who would defend his fiction from charges of chauvinism: “No, you’ve got me wrong. I really *am* sexist.” Tom’s depiction of his relationship with Anabel, with its obvious misogynist clichés, its backhanded self-pity, its stale preoccupations with the political correctness of private sexual fantasy, seems to want to be some sort of satire. You could imagine it reworked into a comic treatment of both the puritanical streak in second-wave feminism *and* a certain kind of defensive male response to it. Instead, the material is forced into an ungainly sincerity in defense of Tom.

To be sure, it is Tom’s memoir, but this brings us to a larger problem. On the topic of his marriage, Tom is an unreliable narrator—his account is understandably tendentious. When a novel has an unreliable narrator, the author typically signals over the narrator’s head so that readers understand the ways in which they should be skeptical of the narrator’s account. But the fictional memoir allows Franzen to leave us unattended. It’s Tom’s ship to steer for 126 pages; Franzen absolves himself of any authorial responsibility to complicate Tom’s interpretation of Anabel and their marriage. One might expect the rest of the novel to provide the necessary corrections to Tom’s view. But the rest of the novel lines up behind Tom. The novel loves Tom. Of course, *Freedom* loves Walter, the well-meaning but weak-willed lawyer, just as *The Corrections* loves Chip, the disgraced academic, but those characters are also comic fools; Franzen leads them into crises of their own making, and along the way we are treated to plenty of less-than-flattering observations of Chip and Walter by other characters. In *Purity*, however, all the other major characters—Andreas, Leila, Pip—testify to Tom’s goodness.

After treating us to many sex scenes with young women, Franzen kills off the men who participated in them,

restores the other characters to age-appropriate couplehood, and reassures us that the good guy only ever had eyes for his middle-aged girlfriend and, back in the day, his wife. Although feminists do not come off especially well in *Purity*, the novel nonetheless seems governed by a violent, retributive pseudo-feminist conscience. Why such rough justice for the lechers? Because young women are vulnerable? Not in *Purity*—they are admirably resilient, downright unexploitable. Because *older* women are vulnerable? That may be more to Franzen’s point. Leila and the middle-aged Anabel are more fragile of ego than the younger women. Perhaps, to contemporary heterosexual sensibilities, each mismatched coupling suggests that an older woman somewhere is being overlooked—an older woman who might be running out of eggs. In Franzen’s vision, a woman’s peak vulnerability to male bad behavior isn’t in her youth (no breakup need matter very much to a woman in her twenties) but toward the end of her reproductive life, when she has only a few years left to have children. The Miss Havisham of today wouldn’t be abandoned at the altar as a young bride, she would be abandoned at thirty-nine, childless. If *Purity* sees age as a problem for women, guilt is the corollary problem for men—guilt of which our friend Tom is carefully absolved while other male characters pay heavily. Suppressed in *Purity*, yet surely giving the novel its hysterical edge, is a different dimension of the problem of age: that it can feel melancholy, even shameful, to grow older while your ideal sexual objects stay young.

All these specters of female nubility make me think of Evan S. Connell’s novel *Mr. Bridge*, whose title character, unlike Tom, is allowed to be aroused by his own daughters. In one of my favorite scenes, Mr. Bridge, a principled, family-minded lawyer in 1930s Kansas City, walks by his daughter Carolyn’s room and inadvertently sees her naked. He then goes to his study and tries to work.

He sat down at his desk, unzipped the briefcase, and started to examine the

papers he had brought from the office; but he saw her nubile body as she posed before the mirror. He reminded himself that she was his daughter, but the luminous image returned like the memory of a dream, and although he dismissed it, soon it returned. He stopped work and held his head in his hands, wondering how much time must go by until he could forget.

Forgetting and forgoing were already out of style when Connell published *Mr. Bridge*, in 1969, the same year that Philip Roth published *Portnoy’s Complaint*. *Mr. Bridge* and its companion, *Mrs. Bridge*, are novels about the upper-middle-class, white Midwest of the Thirties, written a generation later, in the Fifties and Sixties. They are, among other things, satires of American sexual ignorance, repression, and fear. Yet Connell’s satire devastates with its generosity: he allows his protagonist the dignity of his sexual restraint, even though that restraint feels baffling, painful, and self-defeating to Mr. Bridge, and risible to readers in 1969 and after. All younger women might as well be Mr. Bridge’s daughters, so little can he imagine actually touching one.

Franzen (like so many novelists) has named the Bridge books among his favorites, which is no surprise to anyone who recalls Alfred and Enid Lambert, the aging parents in *The Corrections*—they have something of the Bridges in their lineage. But Franzen’s younger characters, those of his own generation, are all Portnoys. They are racked by their desires. They struggle with them volubly and flamboyantly, and in the end they act on them, usually getting in a lot of trouble and then getting redeemed.

Latent in *Purity*, and particularly in Tom, is the possibility of a different course of action: the lost practice of putting your head in your hands and waiting for your desires to go away. Mr. Bridge’s approach would seem to have beneficial applications beyond avoiding incest—beyond, even, the realm of sex. But *which* desires should you sit out, which act on, and what might be the price—both personal and social—of either choice? That much *Purity* cannot show us. ■

JOINT VENTURES

How sneakers became high fashion and big business

By Charles Bock

Discussed in this essay:

Where'd You Get Those? New York City's Sneaker Culture 1960–1987. Tenth Anniversary Edition, by Bobbito Garcia. Testify Books. 280 pages. \$40. testifybooks.com.

Out of the Box: The Rise of Sneaker Culture, by Elizabeth Semmelhack. Rizzoli. 256 pages. \$45. rizzoliusa.com.

Sneakerheadz, directed by David T. Friendly and Mick Partridge. Friendly Films/Jump Films, 2015. 70 minutes.



Say you were a city kid growing up in America. Say you wanted to show off your grace and speed, your skills and creativity, your vision and stroke and raw power. You wanted to break laws and defy gravity. But you needed ankle support, and it was helpful to not burn the hell out of your soles. A good basketball sneaker mattered.

In 1923 Converse put the name of one of their salesmen, a balding white guy called Charles “Chuck” Taylor, on

the side of a sneaker, but the Seventies saw corporate America finally acknowledge urban influence, the city game. Black players started getting paid to endorse basketball shoes: first Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, jazz fluid and unstoppable, with his picture on the tongue of an Adidas high-top; then Knicks guard Walt Frazier rocking low-top suede Pumas; then high-flying, superbly Afroed, ferociously goateed Julius Erving, who wore leather Converse with DR. J printed above the outsoles. Most sneakers of the era looked similar: leather or canvas or mesh, some with ankle support, always a layer of colored, vulcanized rubber for the sole. Nevertheless, your kicks an-

nounced your style, the fact that you belonged to a particular world, or at least that you wanted to belong.

In 1982, Nike introduced a leather high-top with a sole whose thickness and cushioning were unprecedented in a basketball shoe. The company called it an Air Force 1 and put a little strap around the high ankle. It looked like a boot you’d wear in outer space. It stayed in production for a year, then, like most sneakers, it was retired. Until 1984, anyway, when three Baltimore retailers—they called themselves the Three Amigos—phoned Nike. Turns out, young men were still coming in and asking for Air Force 1s. The Amigos wanted more shoes, and to get them back in production they agreed to Nike’s shakedown: they ordered 2,400 pairs of sneakers and paid for them in advance. Before long, Nike was sending a monthly shipment of Air Force 1s, with a different color scheme each time, to Baltimore. Customers from Philadelphia and Harlem started making regular trips in on I-95, and they were soon joined by reps from a Bronx store known as Jew Man’s, who bought up the Amigos’ deadstock—untouched, unworn, unsold sneakers. In New York, when someone asked where you got your Air Force 1s, the answer was, inevitably, “Uptown.”

If you were really in the know, however, if you were a certain sort of New York kid—the kind of basketball junkie who scoped *Sports Illustrated* each week for pictures of rare shoes on college players, who traveled with an extra toothbrush and tube of toothpaste to keep your kicks unscuffed—then, eventually, you learned that for serious heat you could also head downtown, into SoHo, to a building on Broadway and Spring. You’d take a freight elevator up to the third floor, where you found the wonderland that was Carlsen Imports. “It was the closest thing to an orgasm a preteen sneaker hound could experience,” says John Merz, a.k.a. Johnny Snakeback Fever.

“Not everyone knew. Now people speak of it in hushed tones,” says Jazzy Art, another early collector. “They always had squash sneakers on display, and hot joints tucked away.” You asked if you could rummage through back shelves. You dusted off old boxes. Yo, how much for these?

Charles Bock’s novel *Alice & Oliver* will be published in February by Random House. His article “Rake’s Progress” appeared in the March 2013 issue of Harper’s Magazine.

This was early sneaker culture: word of mouth, whispered trends, mom-and-pop shops, and that most undefinable and fleeting quality—cool. The travails of Johnny Snakeback Fever, Jazzy Art, Mark Money, and more than a few other excellent nicknames are brought together, like a webbing of loose laces, in Bobbito Garcia's *Where'd You Get Those? New York City's Sneaker Culture 1960–1987*. The book's endpapers show a crowd at Rucker Park, in Harlem, transfixed by the action on the court. The pages between offer an unholy amount of photographs, advertisements, and sneaker catalogues: all the colors of Puma Sky IIs, which were famous for having two Velcro straps at the ankle; the riches of bedroom sneaker collections (a.k.a. quivers); a creased Xerox with the typed-out summer workout schedule of the famed DeMatha High basketball team; shots of lithe young ballers in short shorts (socks pulled up high, stripes bright and thick); guides to sneaker customization (“He broke out aluminum Rustoleum, taped off the black stripes, and he sprayed the entire shoe metallic silver”); and an illustration of the jelly roll—when you roll your socks up in the bottom of your sneakers to fill them out.

Garcia's book shows an evolution that starts in the Sixties with versions of simple canvas sneakers. Street legend Richard “Pee Wee” Kirkland remembers wearing Converse, and that “dragging your foot going for a dunk would wear them out real fast.” Greg “Elevator Man #2” Brown says, “If you were a serious ballplayer maybe you could pull off some skippies like the Decks by Keds, but no way could you wear P.F.s [P.F. Flyers] on the court. No way!” We move into the Seventies, when a bystander first saw a pair of leather basketball sneakers: high-top white Adidas, worn by Joe “The Destroyer” Hammond when he scored fifty-five points in a one-on-one game in Rucker Park. If someone stepped on Hammond's sneakers, he'd stop in the middle of the game and rub away the scuffs. In the Eighties, the first generation of beat-boy crews leaps in, spinning while balanced on one hand, posing for Polaroids in puffy

jackets with bandannas covering their mouths. Garcia includes a photograph of one kid, mugging in square glasses and a mustache that won't quite grow in, pointing to a Fila cap and to his matching kicks.

There is a family-reunion feel to this book, a sense that it was made by sneaker freaks explicitly for sneaker freaks. In the same way that going through old photo albums is better when a family member can fill in the appropriate memories, *Where'd You Get Those?* is at its best when commentary provides context. We hear from Blitz, a.k.a. Z, who lost his cherished Nike Franchises to a friend in a pinball game, only to see his friend's dad wear them to mow the lawn the next day, their leather splattered with dead grass. “The sneaker was taken so far out of its intended sphere that it was truly an insult,” a third party recalls. “They were in a universe they never expected to be in... I believe Z started to cry.” The book also quotes Michael Berrin, a.k.a. MC Serch, whose crew, 3rd Bass, hit steady rotation on MTV with their song “The Gas Face.” Serch was rocking his Air Force Zeros on the subway when he heard a rustle by his foot. “I turned around and it was a derelict bent down over my sneakers,” Serch says. “And he kissed them! He got up and told me that they were the first pair of sneakers he played in at Lincoln [High School], and that it was the greatest year of his life. That was the nuttiest shit.”

Nobody could know, of course, what was coming. In the Eighties, Reebok was the reigning sneaker king, thanks to a focus on women's aerobics. In 1984, Nike's stock was dropping—the Oregon-based company had recently closed one of its New England factories. Ten million dollars had been cut from the company's operating budget, and Phil Knight, Nike's cofounder and CEO, was trying to trim his basketball operations. At the urging of Sonny Vaccaro, the company's talent scout, Nike set its sights on the college player of the year, a charismatic, six-foot-six talent named Michael Jordan. Jordan, however, was a self-proclaimed “Adidas nut.” He only agreed to consider the deal that Vaccaro proposed be-

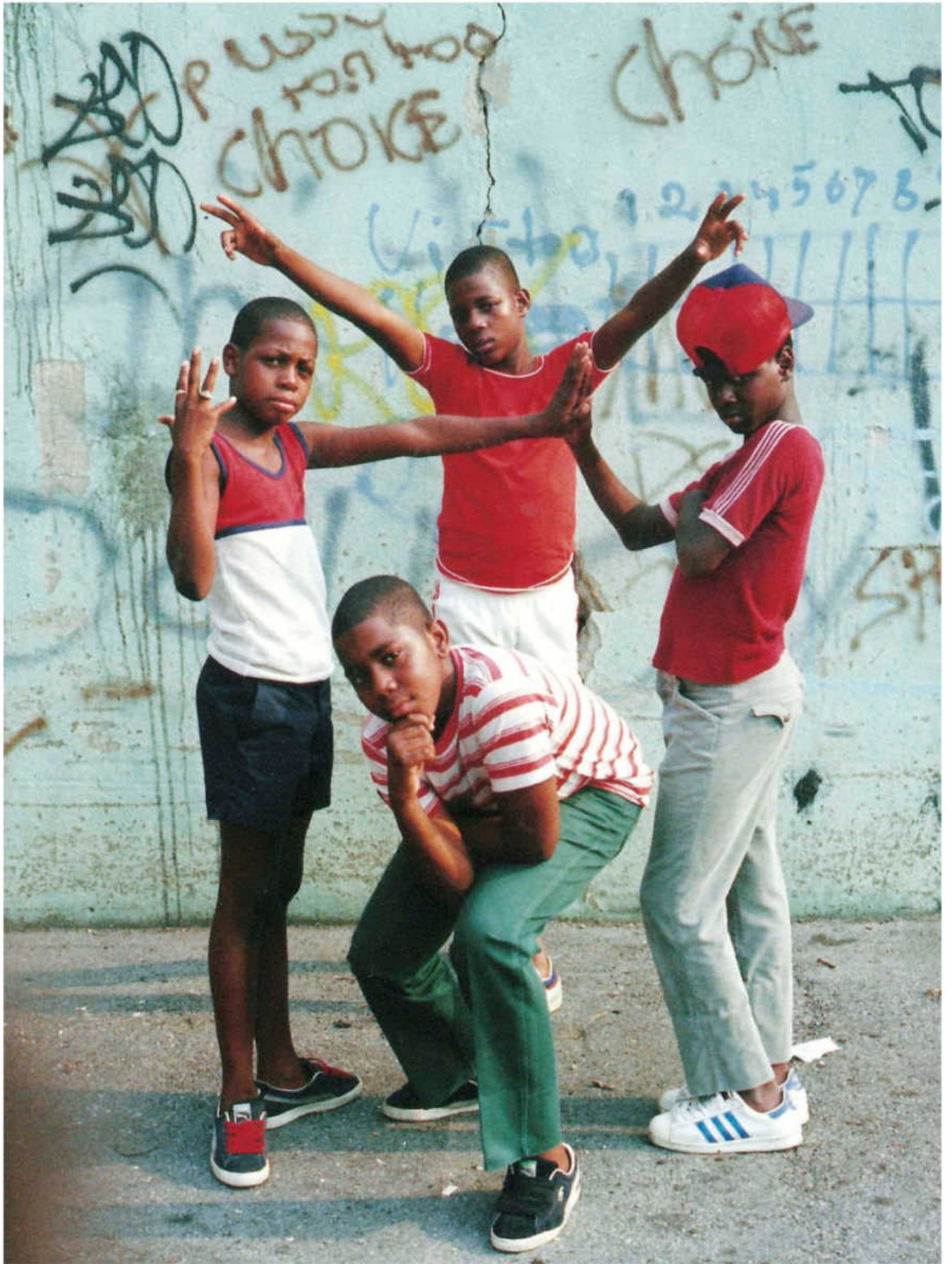
cause Nike promised him a car. Even after he saw the logo for the shoe Nike wanted to make for him, with AIR JORDAN printed above a winged basketball, he didn't want to fly to Portland for a follow-up with Nike reps. Jordan didn't like the first prototype of the sneaker, a black-and-red high-top. “I can't wear that shoe,” he said. “Those are the devil's colors.” Nike offered him royalties on every pair of Air Jordans and on every basketball sneaker the company sold beyond the 400,000 it had moved the previous season. Even so, Jordan told Adidas reps that he would go with them if they came anywhere close to Nike's offer.

Adidas's demurral, it seems safe to say, remains the single worst business decision in sports history. Chicago's new shooting guard started his rookie campaign with a leaning dunk that seemed to keep him in the air forever. The NBA began fining Jordan \$5,000 per game for breaking its uniform code. (What rule did the sneakers violate? David Letterman asked. “Well, it doesn't have any white in it,” Jordan said. Letterman: “Neither does the NBA.”) Nike not only paid the fines but created an ad based on the violation. During the opening rounds of the 1985 All-Star dunk contest, Jordan was resplendent in black-and-red Js, matching sportswear, and a thin gold necklace. He double-clutched; he three-sixtied.

“The first Air Jordan, in any true connoisseur's view, looked garbage,” Garcia says:

The only person who looked jazzy in them was Jordan himself, yet everyone had them and swore they were the shit. Air Jordans represented the antithesis of what sneaker culture in New York was all about. It was the first sneaker in New York history that gained popularity on the street that it didn't deserve. It was the beginning of a homogeneous style for youth and brand loyalty, two phenomena that could never have existed in the independent, freestyling era of sneaker culture from '70–'87.

Did I know they looked garbage? Fifteen-year-old me? I was a hooping fiend, and spent my hours after school playing pickup. I practiced figure eights and helicopter dribbles at night in my suburban Vegas garage. I



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was convinced that when puberty really kicked in, I'd be a prospect to play college ball. In the meantime, I knew I didn't have enough game or stature to wear those buttery black-and-reds without ridicule, so I set my sights on the white pair with a gray swoosh. Sixty-seven dollars, plus tax. I was the target audience, what Garcia and his connoisseur friends would call a typical herb, "the antithesis of what sneaker culture in New York was all about." I just wanted to be someone else, someone strong and athletic and cool. And who was cooler than Michael Jordan?

Jordans spread through suburbia and the inner city that first season, with gross revenues surpassing \$100 million. Now we know that this was only the beginning. Just as Jordan went on to become the best basketball player of the modern era, Nike went on to dominate the sneaker world. In 2014, the company controlled 83 percent of the \$3 billion U.S. market for basketball shoes.

Air Jordans are at once a marker of downness among stylish black high-school kids on the Q train and a signifier of ultracool for Asian hypebeasts on Fourteenth Street; they are cherished by computer-savvy, next-generation herbs in the suburbs and de rigueur for impassive white frat types with baseball caps worn at militarily precise angles. On occasion, forty-six-year-old novelists might even wear them.

Sneaker culture is now a conspicuous, consumptive, bizarre thing: a subculture that has grown up around limited-edition, high-priced basketball sneakers and the people who collect them. We're not talking about the smelly skippies fermenting in the back of your closet or the kicks that sit untouched on Foot Locker walls. Modern sneaker culture revolves around retro Air Jordans. One of only seventy-two pairs of Undfnd x Air Jordan IVs ever made was offered on eBay for \$30,000; a pair of gold-eyel XIs was a comparative steal at \$9,999.99. Technologically advanced sneakers attached to players who were marketed as Jordan's successors (Anfernee Hardaway, Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Kevin Durant) are also coveted; it's easy to find Kobes, Le-

Brons, and Foamposites going for more than \$1,000 a pair. Sneaker conventions routinely draw thousands of young men (or boys, with sneaker moms in tow) hauling plastic containers of their best Nikes. They spend the first twenty minutes after their arrival in a frenzy of wheeling and dealing and counting fat wads of cash.

Meanwhile, every weekend, two or three or six new designs get released—"dropped"—and young men line up waiting for stores to open. Something's wrong if a new model of Jordans remains in stock at the end of its release day. Those who get a pair might take to Instagram and preen, or they might log on to eBay and sell. Campless.com—a website that tracks the sneaker-resale market—estimates that sneaker resales totaled more than \$1 billion last year.

Where'd You Get Those? is a book for initiates, the people who will stop on certain pages to reminisce: had those, had those, didn't play in those, just wore them around. *Out of the Box: The Rise of Sneaker Culture*, which was published by Rizzoli to accompany an exhibition on view through October 4 at the Brooklyn Museum, has a wider reach. It's an art book for hardcore collectors as well as for anyone who's ever seen those Saturday-morning lines and wondered, huh? This may not be immediately apparent; Elizabeth Semmelhack, the book's author and the curator of the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, clearly designed the opening pages for brethren. The cover has a pair of the original Air Jordans, and the first page inside goes in close for details. Next, a two-page splash of Air Jordans forms a blooming flower. The appearance a few pages later of a rare, cartoon-bright sneaker made to honor Stewie, LeBron James's favorite *Family Guy* character, demonstrates Semmelhack's eye.

From there *Out* goes backward, guiding readers step by step, era by era, through nearly two hundred years of sneaker history. Did you know that the sneaker may have its roots in the beach sandshoes that the Liverpool Rubber Company introduced in the 1830s? Did you know that Keds were a creation of the United States Rubber Company? Me neither, but there they are, clear bonds between sneakers and empire. Turn the

page and see the type of running shoes that Jesse Owens practiced in. Semmelhack writes that Adi Dassler, the founder of Adidas, defied the Nazis and tried to get shoes to Owens through back channels. *Out* hits every important historical mark, from Owens to the inner-city sneaker murders of the Eighties and Nineties to the sweatshops controversy, though the breadth of this project means there's no time to linger. There are places I'd want to delve deeper.

Then again, the real substance of the book is the images. We see Farrah Fawcett skateboarding through the Seventies in her Nike runners; the Ramones looking like scuzzy delinquents in leather jackets and dirty Chucks and Keds; a closeup of Run DMC's clamshell Adidas. Testimonials on black pages intervene every so often. Christian Louboutin says that "the sneaker is to men what the high-heeled pump is to women," and street artist Mister Cartoon claims that sneakers are to New Yorkers what cars are to Angelenos: "Whips on the East Coast are their shoes, because they're living in the Bronx and they ain't got no Impalas."

Out has an obvious flaw, one that's probably unavoidable. The book needs Nike, the big dog of the pack. So, yes: the Air Jordan cover, the close-up, the flower spread, the *Family Guy* LeBrons. The Air Force 1 merits its two-page splash, surely. But *Out*'s middle sixteen pages are all Jordans. Does the company's market dominance demand that page count? We are treated to a parade of lesser Jordan models, the overdesigned and gimmicky relatives of the shoes that everyone loves. There is no interview with Jordan, which isn't surprising—he's never spoken in any serious way about the effect Air Jordans have had on the culture (or on his life). And although there are interviews with Tinker Hatfield and Eric Avar, the designers of the most important Jordan and Kobe models, that are wonky about architecture and shoe specifics, they read as though they've been sanded down by P.R. bots.

Thirty years after Jordan wore those black-and-red shoes in his first dunk contest, New York City hosted the NBA's All-Star Weekend. It was basically a weeklong sneakerfest. In hopes of attracting the most attention to its brand and prod-

uct, Adidas had Kanye West handing out pairs of his new sneakerboot at its SoHo store. Nike plastered ads throughout the subways and transformed a corner lot on the Bowery into a giant Nike shoe box with a store inside. They also opened a Jordan Brand pop-up on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn.

The morning after Valentine's Day, the morning of the All-Star game, I woke at five and bundled up. Starting at six, I'd heard, the pop-up on Flatbush would be selling customizable pairs of the original black Jordans; each could be laser-printed with special patterns, including the store's address. The lasering took about a minute; when the red beam etched along the inside of a cardboard box, a little fire rose on impact. The morning was dark and frozen beyond words, the coldest February in a century. A layer of snow dusted the sidewalks.

I arrived at the pop-up shop at 5:55 A.M. The storefront was painted to a bright white sheen that glowed in the predawn light. An adjacent brick wall showed Michael Jordan in mid-air. Between twenty and fifty people were already in line, most of them youngish black men. Inside, above a section of the floor from the old Chicago Stadium that was imprinted with the Air Jordan logo, a display showed the progression of Jordans from I to XX8. The store was a million light-years from what I imagine Carlsen Imports looked like.

I took my place in the back of the line, behind a thirty-eight-year-old retail manager from Miami. He told me that his first Air Jordans were IVs. He spent a year mowing lawns and saving up for them. "It used to be a subculture, but now it's the culture," he said. He was the only one in line who had hand warmers, and we were all very covetous. Our griping ended when a Nike employee came out and distributed yellow bracelets all down the line. Most of the people in front were resellers. Some of them had been waiting since the day before for a pair of blue, quilted Air Jordan II Retros made in collaboration with Chicago-based designer Don C, which retails for \$275 but could fetch more than \$1,000 online.

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At six-thirty, the Flatbush shop still had not opened its metal gates. I spoke to a man named Randell, who was six foot four and size fourteen and grateful for it: "I can slide in and get kinds that others wouldn't get, because my sizes don't sell out as quick." I was pretty sure that my thumb was frostbitten. My pen had frozen into uselessness a long time ago. One man said, "Why you asking questions? You know what this is about."

This spring, a documentary called *Sneakerheadz* premiered at the South by Southwest film festival. Directed by David T. Friendly (a producer of *Little Miss Sunshine*) and music-video director Mick Partridge, the film—which will be released widely this fall—is polished and thoughtful, quickly paced, probing, and thoroughly enjoyable. It's the first serious cinematic exploration of sneaker mania. "A sneakerhead is so obsessed with sneakers that they're willing to forgo paying the rent to say they own a shoe that they will never wear," one of the happily afflicted explains in the film. Major-league pitcher Jeremy Guthrie shows off the safe where he stores his collection; basketball star Carmelo Anthony admits he stopped counting his shoes at a thousand pairs.

The film also shows a hulking musclehead punching a skinny young man repeatedly in the face, even after the victim is lying on his back in the grass. People are watching, going *ooh*. We hear laughing. The hulk rips off the victim's sneakers. Beats him with one, then takes them both. We watch snippets of brawls inside sneaker shops, sheriffs in riot gear with shields and truncheons lined up outside a mall. Helicopters circle overhead.

For more than a decade now, Nike has decided to limit releases to keep its best sneakers exclusive, expensive, and hyped. This strategy is a perver-

sion of the rising-from-the-asphalt, searching-the-dusty-shelves appeal that created this world. It also has starker consequences: three decades of murders tied to sneaker theft. Dazie Williams, whose son Joshua was killed over a pair of rare XIs, told the filmmakers that Michael Jordan called and gave her his condolences. "I asked him, could we meet and talk about a solution," she said. The film does not tell us how Jordan responded.

Young men who want and love something as basic as a sports shoe are getting manipulated, abused, and sometimes killed because a bunch of guys in suits want to wring more money out of them. They put value into a system that is straight up punking them. I know all this, and yet I still peruse sites, still buy. Basketball sneakers connect me to being young, and they give me a break from parenting. My hobby is mine. I make compromises, promise myself that I'll only get discounts, oddities, or resales, or stuff I wish I'd gotten back in the day, or maybe that beautiful rare exception. I ignore the contradictions the same way I ignore sweatshop exploitation.

One reason for hope is this: cool stuff will always find its way through the cracks. Bodega, an old-school sneaker shop in Boston, opened in 2006 to recreate the experience of "hunting for great secret[s] hidden behind the dirty doors of the city." There are posters and graffiti in the store's front room, and beautiful displays in the back, a tribute to golden-era hunts for great sneakers. "We wanted to bring back that sense of discovery," Oliver Mak, one of the store's owners, says in *Sneakerheadz*. "People showing up and going, *Oh my God*."

In 2008, Bodega created what I consider to be one of the high points of modern sneakerdom: a special edition of Puma's beloved Sky II model from

the Eighties. Using the Spy vs. Spy comic as a theme and working in collaboration with *Mad* magazine and Puma, Bodega tricked these joints out to an absurd degree: a Velcro pocket in each of the tongues; bullet holes in the insoles; translucent images of the spies on the soles; Morse code across the ankle strap (a tip of the hat: Antonio Prohías, the Cuban artist behind the cartoons, always signed his name in Morse code). Each sneaker also contained a secret message that led you to a trail of clues. Just as the comic's black and white spies were in love with a mysterious female gray spy, so the clues led to thirty pairs of gray sneakers, called Gray Spies. Figure out the clues, you got a free pair.

The black-and-white versions sold out within a day. Puffy was caught on MTV wearing them. A pair came my way, thanks to eBay, for just less than the amount this magazine reimburses for research. The secret-message dossier was still inside the Velcro pocket, including a phone number written in Morse code. Mak told me that, as best he recalled, after the phone number there was a website, which led to a scrambled audio recording, which hid the location of a post-office box. He guessed ten to fifteen people discovered the Gray Spies.

Five years later, three pairs are still for sale online, for \$400 each. My guess is that Bodega is selling them, though the store would not confirm that. As for the others, I am told they are at rest, buried deep in personal collections. The mystery cannot be solved. The number is out of service. The P.O. box has been abandoned. The Gray Spies represent everything that's still exciting about the subculture: the impulse to keep innovating, the exhilaration of something new, the sense of pleasure and excitement and exploration. The Gray Spy is no more. Long live the Gray Spy. ■

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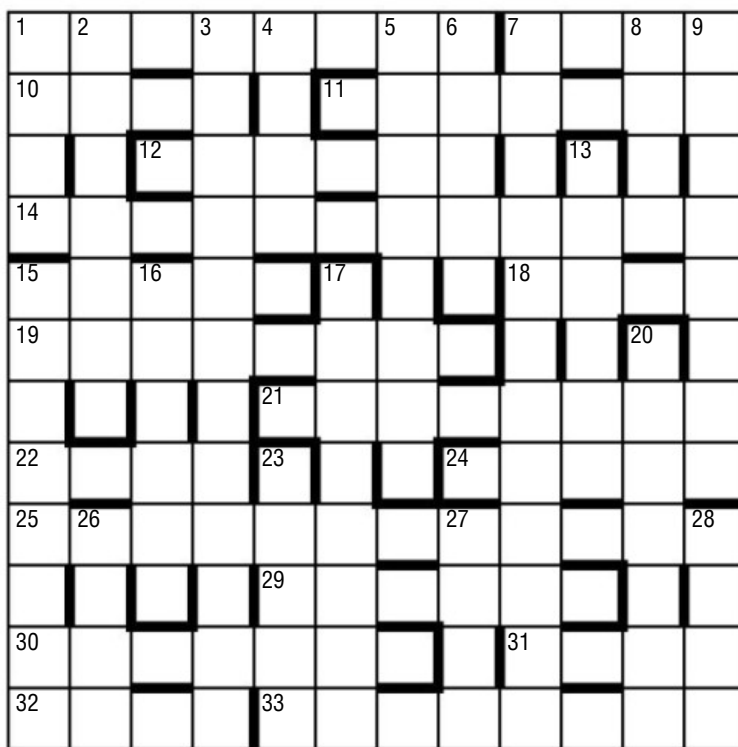
PUZZLE

FOURSOMES

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

The pattern of heavy bars in this puzzle has four-way symmetry: it remains the same no matter which side is up. Therefore the clues have been grouped into foursomes, in which each group comprises the four entries sharing symmetrical placement. Within each foursome, however, the clues are listed in random order; the solver must place them correctly in the diagram.

Clued answers include five proper nouns. The entries at 8D and 27D are uncommon. The entry at 29A is one of several spellings. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 87.



CLUES

1A, 33A, 9D, 15D (8)

Spanish leaders—each gets official after I empty the sink (4,4)

Check for pesky critters

Curious bleating coming from concrete

Special terms for the writer: "Wills Covering Death"

7A, 32A, 1D, 28D (4)

Viet follower against government leader

Lose head of steers in woods

Something between springs that adds energy to sleep

Note morning papers, collectively

10A, 31A, 8D, 26D (4)

Listen to any, any goose!

Season when a hotel becomes hot?

Contributor to blessed existence

I got to lay off Tchaikovsky's father

11A, 30A, 2D, 20D (7)

Newt (not Gingrich) enters for fear that I'm least conservative?

E.g., billed to build house when it's not finished? Goodness

no! Upsetting!

Spottings produced by palsies

Crafted leather from a Southern state

12A, 29A, 13D, 16D (6)

I regret getting a business degree, leaving a stain

Find some wool itching—that's nutty!

Turnover: a dessert some initially made in classes

Second gone, twelve's pickings can be slim

14A, 25A, 3D, 7D (12)

Big post with a hundred locks and staffs up on it

Humors people taking time to be seen in paintings

Has a wrong view of the Church of England—outside it's wildly impressive

Throw dirt on the embassy? It gives one pause*

15A, 24A, 6D, 23D (5)

No ally retreating finds you carrying soldiers

Trapped, needing time? Uprising does

Rates changed? It's shocking

Heir to the throne leaves church in a French town

18A, 22A, 4D, 27D (4)

Roses show early indications of rain, even dry spells

A mug shot for a position in *South Pacific*

Porgy and Bess's finale gets trophy

Rustic Uber taxis

19A, 21A, 5D, 17D (8)

Caduceus designed to be assembled locally

Goodwill gets work of muralist

Sweet letters stir a misunderstanding somewhat

It comes after one teardrop, sadly

* A classic *Sondheim* clue.

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Foursomes," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by September 18. The sender of the first correct solution opened at random will receive a one-year subscription to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). The winner's name will be printed in the November issue. The winner of the July puzzle, "Sixes and Sevens," is Jeff Folts, Hatfield, Mass.



FINDINGS

An Orange County, California, man accused a dolphin of punching his daughter, and scientists dismissed fears that the pacu fish, recently sighted in New Jersey, has a taste for testicles. The climbing perch, which can live out of water for six days and hibernate on land for six months, was approaching Australia, where rising temperatures were turning bearded dragons female, chestnut-crowned babblers exhibited protolanguage, red-necked wallabies favored their left hands for fine manipulation, middle managers were found to be highly disengaged, and a University of Sydney biologist advised that cane toads should be killed by “moving them to the freezer beside the ice cream.” White Americans who watch videos of other white Americans smiling and gazing at black Americans exhibit less racism. When Tibetans dream of death, their dreamlands are white, grayish-white, and red. Rats dream of inaccessible treats. The placebo effect persists even when patients know that they are taking placebos. Half of eye-cancer patients who have undergone enucleation experience a phantom eye; one fifth of these patients experience pleasurable sensations in the phantom eye. Psychologists monitored the “aesthetic chills” induced by films and music, as measured by goosebumps captured with a Goosecam. Companies with anthropomorphic mascots are perceived to be unfair when they raise their prices. Monkeys whose brains are linked with electrodes are better at moving a robotic arm with their thoughts. Austrian researchers unveiled a method of calculating the precise time of death of a pig.

Lovebirds were found to rotate their heads 2,700 degrees per second. Oral sex among Canadian adolescents is accelerated by texting. Poor working memory makes adolescents likelier to engage in impulsive sex; good working memory makes children better liars. Gay men exhibit less gender homophily than straight men. A man named Rod was struck by lightning for the second time. Fifty-one percent of amateur erotic fiction written by eunuchs and aspiring eunuchs involves forced castration. Prenatal co-

caine exposure more than doubles a child's odds of having sex by age fifteen, as does lead exposure during preschool. Turkish university students who are shown titillating videos of designer jeans and Enrique Iglesias are worse at recalling German words. A woman's conscientiousness correlates with the length of her fellatio. Easily disgusted women become more easily disgusted when aroused, whereas disgust-resistant women become less so. Among American university students, 3.7 percent say that it is “definitely sex” to masturbate while on the phone, while 0.7 percent say that it is “definitely not sex” to engage in penile-vaginal intercourse in which both partners achieve orgasm. The leg muscles of space mice atrophy, but their cheek muscles do not.

Scientists shaved Saharan silver ants and exposed them to a xenon lamp and a cold plate to imitate the sun and the sky. Zoologists trained heroin-sniffing honeybees. Genetic monitoring of bee populations is more efficient when the tested bees are first turned into soup. Myrmecologists described six new species of cryptic subterranean Dracula ants. Vampires are afraid of coming out to their doctors. The Bodélé Depression has been fertilizing the Amazon rainforest with transatlantic dust only since Lake Mega-Chad dried rapidly a thousand years ago. *Pandanus candelabrum* plants indicate the presence of diamonds in West Africa's Man Shield. Freshwater consumption has crossed the planetary boundary. Simply asking is not sufficient to diagnose depression in dying Portuguese. Suicide may be an inflammatory response. School shootings are contagious. Oncologists described how to induce cells of breast cancer, esophageal cancer, and colorectal cancer to levitate. German scientists published a proposal to cure a white elephant of autism using acoustic smiles, after which he will become human, take on the name Szilamandee, and lead humanity with “the deepest voice of history.” Peer-review standards in scientific journals were found to vary widely. ■

“Homecoming,” an altered found photograph by Caleb Cole, from the *Odd One Out* series.
Courtesy the artist and Gallery Kayafas, Boston

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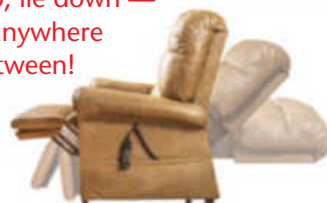
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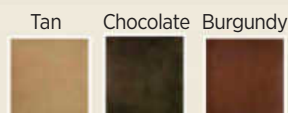
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